

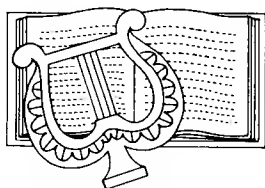
THE IDOL'S EYE

BY W. STEPHENS HAYWARD

AUTHOR OF "THE BLACK ANGEL."



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In Memoriam

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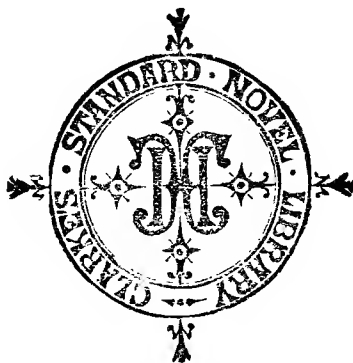
BEING ADVENTURES IN SEARCH OF
A BIG DIAMOND.

BY

W. STEPHENS HAYWARD,

AUTHOR OF

'THE BLACK ANGEL,' 'STAR OF THE SOUTH,' 'FIERY CROSS,' 'REBEL
PRIVATEER,' 'MUTINY OF THE THUNDER,' 'THE GOLDEN REEF,'
'LORD SCATTERBRAIN,' ETC.



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NOVELS AND TALES

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'THE BLACK ANGEL.'

Post 8vo, Picture Boards, price 2s. each.

THE BLACK ANGEL.

THE STAR OF THE SOUTH.

THE FIERY CROSS.

THE REBEL PRIVATEER.

LOVE'S TREASON.

TOM HOLT'S LOG.

LORD SCATTERBRAIN.

WILD AND WONDERFUL.

THE DEMONS OF THE SEA.

RODNEY RAY.

LOVE AND ADVENTURE.

THE CLOUD KING.

RAN AWAY FROM HOME.

MILDRED'S CROSS.

MUTINY OF THE THUNDER.

THE GOLDEN REEF.

DR. ANDREW LORRIMER.

IDOL'S EYE.

AND

ONE IN A THOUSAND.

THE IDOL'S EYE.



INTRODUCTION.

‘I KNEW it was Andrew,’ said Ruth, as the door opened and the young man entered.

All eyes were turned towards him for a moment, and then the gaze of the family group was concentrated on his companion—a stranger.

The old cat arched her back and hissed, and then got under the huge old wardrobe or press.

The two dogs, Bruin and Leo, snarled and showed their teeth; the tame owl, perched on the top of the wardrobe, hooted out his harsh scream; and the talking starling chattered, ‘Get out, get out!’

There seemed a sudden sensation of cold to pervade the whole party, chilling them, as it were, to the very marrow.

Perhaps it was the cold air of the Canadian snowstorm raging without which caused this sudden chill.

But yet the door had been opened several times before that evening, and no such deathly chill was felt.

Could it be the mysterious stranger whose

entrance with Andrew Battel caused this shuddering sensation of cold?

Truly he was a strange, weird-looking being.

But, before speaking of him, we will devote a short chapter to the Battel family, now comfortably settled on a tract of fertile land in the far-away backwoods of Canada.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER—THE ONE-EYED SNAKE.

A ROARING fire of Canadian pine-logs blazed on the broad open hearth, the genial glow it threw out thoroughly warming every corner of the big backwood hut, whilst the merry crackle of the flames seemed to laugh to scorn the di-mal howling of the snowstorm which raged without.

It was a huge open chimney, with chimney-corners on either side—a real old-fashioned English chimney-place, such as is only to be found in some old farmhouses in the ‘old country.’

The ‘*old country*’ was the endearing name this emigrant family—settled in the backwoods of Canada—always used when speaking of the tight little island.

Always, too, when there was talk of any one going back across the Atlantic, the phrase was not ‘going to England,’ but ‘going home.’

‘Wherever can Andrew be?’ remarked Philip Battel, eldest son of this well-to-do emigrant family.

‘Guess he’s staying it out down creek at the store till this hyar snow-screamer has blowed itself out a bit.’

It was one Peter Carder who spoke—a down-east Yankee, six feet eleven inches in his socks, a very giant in stature, with limbs like oak saplings, and body like the trunk of an iron-bark tree.

He was at once friend, guest, and field and forest help to the Battels—his knowledge of back-wood craft and North American farming, timber felling, and land clearing generally, having stood the Battels in good stead when they first arrived in the colony.

A Yankee born and bred, he left Massachusetts, his native state, for sound and solid reasons.

When he crossed the border into Canada, the second year of the great American civil war had commenced.

Now Peter Carder had his own views on this question—views which fully accounted for his course of action in leaving the States, and coming over into British dominions. The reader will best understand them in his own words.

‘Yer see, I’m all for the Union—game to fight for the Union, and help squash up the rebels like an eggshell. But I don’t go in for stealing. Yer see, slavery is a part o’ the Constitution; and if we Northerners want to abolish slavery and set all the niggers free, we ought to do it at our own expense. Pay for ’em in an honest and manly manner, like you Britishers did when yer let loose yer West India niggers. But for Mrs. Beccher Stowe and Parson Brownlow and that lot a-gettin’ our President, old Abe, to declare all the slaves free without a red cent of expense—as they want to and will, I

reckon—to no one but the planters, which it's ruin to, I didn't see it—and I didn't see the exact glory of being conscripted and sent down South to fight whether I liked it or not. So says I, when I hears I was likely to be conscripted, "*It can't be did.*" May I be rammed, jammed, slammed, and banged if Uncle Sam s agoin' to stick up this six foot eleven of human timber for the rebels to make a target of and practise at. So I just slips up North by the underground railway, crosses the border, and here I am—and here I mean to stay till they've fount that muss out down South. Yes, sirree!

Very shortly after arriving on Canadian territory Peter Carder fell across the Battels, newly come from England. He was not short of money, having fifteen hundred dollars in specie.

He did not mean to settle permanently in Canada, as he intended, when the war was over, to go back to his father's farm in Massachusetts. But he was not of the lazy sort, so he at once offered his services to Philip Battel senior.

A bargain was soon struck, and the Battels had good reason to rejoice at falling across such a help. Not only was his strength enormous, but he was quick, keen-witted, and well skilled in all matters relating to forest life, hunting, and backwood farming.

'Guess he's staying it out down creek at the store till this hyar snow-screamer has blowed itself out a bit.'

To him replied Philip Battel—Farmer Battel they called him in that far-away western country, to distinguish him from his eldest son Philip,

'No, no, Peter, that won't do; that ain't the style of my boy Andrew. If it snowed red-hot

drops of iron in place of snowflakes, Andrew Battel wouldn't be stayed.'

'What do you mean by insinuating that my brother Andrew was one to be frightened by a bit of a snow-squall? I'd have you know, you great long Yankee, our English lads can stand heat and cold as well as you Americans. I've a great mind to start you off down creek to find out what it is keeps Andrew, and we waiting tea for him.'

It was Ruth Battel who spoke—a soft-eyed, brown-haired English maiden, the flower of the flock, who had woven around the giant's heart a net of silken cords.

Humbly he replied, rising at the time,

'O, I'll go, Miss Ruth, if you wish it.'

'I've a great mind to,' said the young lady; but her younger sister interrupted,

'No, don't send him down creek, Ruth; punish him another way. Don't speak to him for a week, the great stupid.'

It was Alice Battel who recommended this penalty.

'I'd rather go, Miss Ruth,' said Peter Carder, moving towards the door.

Ruth turned her graceful head a little, listened, and then said,

'Sit down this instant; there is no need for you to go. Here he comes; I can hear his step.'

'Yes, that is Andrew's footfall,' said Alice; 'but there's somebody with him. I wonder who it can be?'

The door opened. For a moment the wintry blast rushed in, and then Andrew Battel entered, followed by the mysterious stranger.

CHAPTER II.

THE BATTELS AND THEIR HOME IN THE
BACKWOODS.

‘FATHER, mother, I have brought a guest with me. I know you will give him welcome and shelter. He has only this night crossed the border to our free British soil—a fugitive, fleeing for freedom from the far South. He will tell you his story presently; it is a wondrous one, I promise you.’

Farmer Battel rose to his feet, and, with true English hospitality, held forth his hand.

‘Story or no story, stranger, fugitive slave, or not, you re welcome in Philip Battel’s house. Come up to the front, lad, and warm yourself; you look half perished wi’ cold. Here, Ruth, set our guest a chair, and see to having some more chops broiled, for doubtless he’s hungry.’

‘Thanks, good senor,’ replied the stranger, in a slight foreign accent. ‘In my childhood and boyhood I lived in a warm climate south of the equator, and for the last few years I have toiled as a slave on a Mississippi cotton plantation. Your Northern snow-storms come strange and harsh to me.’

Ruth placed a chair for the stranger; Philip went out and fetched in two more great logs and threw them on the fire; the two dogs, scolded by their master, ceased snarling and showing their teeth, manifesting their dislike to the stranger only by an occasional low growl; the cat came from under the big wardrobe, the owl stopped hooting, and the starling got tired of calling, ‘Go out, get out!’

Ample room was made for the stranger, his chair drawn close up to the blazing fire, and he was left to warm his shivering frame.

Whilst he is thus agreeably occupied, we will again turn our attention to the Battel family, and then to the mysterious stranger himself.

Philip Battel was a farmer in a southern county of England. For generations his ancestors before him had farmed the same land—about four hundred and fifty acres—rich grass and arable. A great part of it was freehold, and the remainder held favourably on lease.

But it happened there were certain mortgages and rent-charges on a portion of the farm; and, moreover, a dispute, fanned by the lawyers into a flame, sprang up between Farmer Battel, then in the prime of life, between forty and fifty years of age, and a neighbour.

In an evil hour Philip Battel was induced to go to law. Suit after suit, action after action, and huge bills of costs about every month were now the order of the day. This lasted for two years, and at the end of that time Philip Battel discovered, to his dismay, that he was all but a ruined man.

The leases were all mortgaged, and even the home farm had a charge upon it.

It was imperative to pay off some of the mortgages and all the interest at once.

The only possible way to do this was by means of a sale, and, with a sad heart, the sturdy English farmer gave the necessary order.

He found that after paying all that was necessary, he would have a balance in hand of rather more than two thousand pounds.

This he thought insufficient to rent a farm with ;

and finally, after much deliberation, he resolved to emigrate to Canada with his family, and endeavour there, on virgin soil, to retrieve his shattered fortunes. His family then consisted of three sons—Philip and John, who had been brought up as farmers, and Andrew Battel, the youngest.

Now Andrew Battel had both more ambition and more energy than his elder brothers, and instead of following the quiet cosy home life on the farm as they did, he was, when a lad of fourteen, articled to a mining engineer.

Being of a mechanical and exploring turn of mind, this suited him admirably, and in five years he was as skilful a mining engineer and as good a judge as his principal.

Then came the family smash, and Andrew, after much compunction and many regrets, resolved to throw in his lot with the rest, and accompany them to that new and favoured land.

But it was not altogether with the intention of farming that Andrew Battel decided on Canada.

He had heard much of the mineral wealth of North America—copper, iron, lead, coal, &c.—and he had a lurking hope that he might yet make a grand discovery, a lucky hit which would at once lead him to fame and wealth.

Above all things, Andrew Battel cherished the idea of one day being able to retrieve the family fortunes, to return to England a rich man, pay off all charges, and once more take possession of the old home, the old acres.

This predominant idea tinged the whole course of his life. He was constantly on the watch—on the look-out for some opportunity to turn up.

He worked with the rest right manfully in

getting the backwood land where they had settled into crop-bearing condition, but, as it were, his mind's eye was always straining far ahead.

He was very quiet, but withal cheerful, accepting his lot, the somewhat dull, monotonous, backwoods life, but always hoping and looking forward to something ahead.

And at last, on this stormy night, he heard a wondrous tale of gorgeous wealth and splendour, which instantly fired his enthusiastic imagination, and though outwardly he was calm and quiet, inwardly he was greatly excited. His pulse beat wildly, and busy fancy pictured to him in the future splendid triumphs, glorious success, boundless wealth.

Besides the boys there were three sisters, Ruth, the eldest, 19; Alice, 17; and Bessie, a charming little girl of 7.

This, then, is the Battel family at the time our tale opens:

Philip Battel and Mrs. Battel, the father and mother, aged 48 each; Philip Battel, the eldest son, 24; John Battel, 22½; Andrew Battel, 21; Ruth 19; Alice, 17; and Bessie, 7.

By this time the stranger has got himself 'thawed a bit,' as Peter Carder, the Yankee, puts it; and we will take a look at him.

In the first place, though, according to his own avowal, a fugitive slave, he was not a nigger—had nothing of the negro type about him.

In complexion he was not nearly so dark as many a Spaniard or Portuguese, while his hair had not the slightest trace of that short wavy curl which is to be seen even in an octoroon, descended from a negro parent.

His nose was thin and straight, ears small and well shaped; the mouth carried a very curious expression, the lips were thin, and the corners turned down; at the same time some white, small, regular teeth were just visible; a slight black moustache was on the upper lip, but so small as in no way to disguise the strange expression of the mouth.

It seemed as though he wore a continual mocking smile; and yet, when he spoke, it was plain such was not the case, for the mouth presented the same appearance when speaking in the most serious manner. But after a bit an observant stranger would find that the singular expression of the mouth might becapable of another interpretation.

It was as the smile of the tiger—cruel, remorseless, implacable

And the whole of the face, carefully studied, would seem to betoken a determined, remorseless nature. And yet it was a handsome face, regular in feature, oval in outline; the complexion a light clear olive.

The most remarkable feature of all, however, was the eye. Only one he had, the other being wanting; the shrunken lid closed down on the empty orbit. But the remaining eye was really astonishing, not so much from its keenness and brilliancy as from a peculiar metallic glitter, scarce ever seen in creation, save in the eyes of certain species of snakes.

It was almost impossible to decide the colour of this eye. At one moment it seemed like a black coal, in the midst of which glowed a red spark.

At another time, and in a different light, it would seem to dart glances of pale-bluish intensity, like forked lightning.

And, again, it would appear to sparkle with a brilliancy and purity of light resembling that of the diamond.

Then, again, it would seem like a great emerald, flashing forth dark-green rays.

Taken altogether, it was the most extraordinary eye ever seen or heard of. And all the while the stranger was warning himself—looking straight in the fire—the Battel family regarded their guest with furtive looks of wonder, almost of alarm.

And yet, barring this extraordinary eye, and the strange expression of face, there was nothing alarming about the stranger.

He was, if anything, below the middle stature and size, rather slender; being framed, it would appear, more for activity than strength.

Indeed, his body seemed as lithe and supple as that of a cat, a leopard, or a tiger.

And yet, beneath the supple and pliable skin there lay bands of muscles hard and firm as hempen cords, tendons and sinews strong as iron wire.

Add to these advantages of activity and strength, extraordinary nervous energy and power of endurance, and it will be conceded that the fugitive slave was no ordinary man.

His English was excellent, marked only by a slight foreign accent, which would seem to denote that he came originally from one of the Spanish colonies, or conquered lands of the New World.

And such indeed was the fact, as will appear presently.

So soon as the stranger had been thoroughly warmed and refreshed with the bountiful fare provided, the women withdrew to the other room.

The Battels—father and sons—lit their pipes, and Andrew, handing a cigar to the guest, said,

‘And now, my friend, I don’t doubt you will relate to my father and brothers some of the strange and wonderful things you told me, also as much as you choose of your own origin and history.’

‘Ay, lad,’ put in Farmer Battel, ‘begin at the beginning. Let us know who you are, what you are, and all about you : that is, if you are so inclined.’

The stranger rose, and, standing in front of the fire, facing the four Battels, thus spoke, taking up as he did so a really striking attitude, and yet not an overstrained one :

‘Good senors, I willingly comply with your wish. In the first place, you, worthy senor,’ addressing Farmer Battel, ‘wish to know who and what I am—my origin: I will tell you. You behold in me the last of the Incas—the ancient emperors of Peru. I am a lineal descendant of the Inca Atahualpa, treacheously murdered by the Spaniard Pizarro in 1533, more than three centuries ago. By lawful descent and right, I who now stand before you—a while back a fugitive slave—*am Inca of Peru, monarch of Chili and Patagonia, possessor of boundless wealth, lawful emperor of those golden glorious lands.*’

CHAPTER III.

THE IDOL'S EYE—A BOLD RESOLUTION FOR AN
EXTRAORDINARY ENTERPRISE.

THERE was a silence after this extraordinary and magnificent declaration by the stranger.

He stood sideways to the fire, one half of his face lighted up by the blaze, the other in the shadow, as there was no other light in the room, the glare of the fire being sufficient.

And on the dark side of the face there gleamed—like a diamond, shining, it seemed, by its own light—the glittering strange eye already spoken of.

They all gazed at him as he thus stood, his features wearing an expression of wild excitement, of enthusiasm, almost akin to the peculiar look of a madman.

And yet he was certainly no madman, for very soon he controlled himself, and his face again assumed its wonted look, the curious half-smile again having place.

Farmer Battel was a man of experience and quick perception, and, as he gazed on his strange guest, he said to himself,

‘Whatever may be the case as to the truth of his extraordinary statements, he believes it himself. The fellow is not a cunning impostor.’

And therein the elder Battel was right.

Philip and John looked at the being before them in silent wonder.

They were somewhat slow in thoughts, and the astounding statement just delivered so seriously absolutely took their breath away, so to speak, and they were really unable to form any opinion on the subject.

Andrew Battel, who had before heard this extraordinary statement, listened and looked with eager ears and eyes—the slight flush on his face, the parted lips, and his general expression of countenance showing his deep interest.

He too, however, said nothing, and it was left

for the tall Yankee, Peter Carder, to break the silence.

‘Jerusalem! Say, Mr. Last of the Incas, kinder strikes me that would be a pritty good sort o’ country to live in, that kingdom o’ yours! Guess a feller oughter make money there pretty considerable. Now, do yer think of going back and taking possession o’ your rights? an’, if so, do yer feel inclined anyhow to take this six foot ten o’ humanity with yer?’

All laughed at Peter’s quaint speech, except Andrew, who looked quite grave and interested, and the stranger himself, who replied quite gravely,

‘Senor, I intend to return to the glorious plains and mountain ranges of South America, and, favoured by fortune and my good star, will claim my own, and reign as monarch over the richest country in the world! There will be great difficulties and dangers to be overcome, hardships to be endured—life itself may be lost in the attempt; but rest assured of this, senor, that when I go, those who accompany me, and survive the perils and fatigues of an expedition which may last two years, will be able to account themselves among the richest men in the world.’

‘Stamp snakes and pumpkin squash!’ exclaimed Peter Carder. ‘Why, I do believe the fellow’s in airnest!’

‘In earnest!’ cried Andrew Battel; ‘of course he is; and what’s more, friend Peter, I do believe there’s truth in what he says.’

‘Ay, senor; it is true—all true—all that I told you down at the store when you were so good as to take part with me against those two Californian rowdies.’

‘Jerusalem! I do wish I’d been there,’ remarked Peter Carder. ‘I do hate the Californians—a murderin’, sneakin’ lot o’ scamps. Guess I’d ha’ made it pretty lively for ’em if they’d set about to interfere with Andrew here.’

‘The senor was quite enough for them,’ remarked the stranger quietly; ‘he had an axe handle he had just bought in his hand. They drew their knives and seemed likely to come on, and I drew my knife too; but Senor Andrew broke the arm of one, and the other didn’t care about a hand-to-hand knife tussle with me, cold and weary as I was.’

‘And so after the “muss” was over,’ said Farmer Battel, ‘I suppose you, Andrew, got this stranger to come into the little back room and spin you all this wonderful yarn, as the sailors say?’

‘Yes, father; and it was indeed a wonderful story—true on the face of it. No man could invent such a series of wonders and be consistent. What do you say to gold everywhere? Golden altars—golden gates—carpets of golden thread—precious stones, such as the Great Mogul never possessed—pearls as large as pigeons’ eggs—emeralds of inestimable value—garnets, topazes, carbuncles, amethysts, sapphires—silver a common metal, and used as such, for cooking utensils and so forth. And diamonds! What would you say to ten large brilliants each as big as a hen’s egg, interspersed with rubies and emeralds of equal size, all set in the golden coronet of an idol? And what do you say to the “Idol’s Eye”? One large diamond in the centre of the forehead, as big as a swan’s egg, and of the first water and brilliancy—eh, father? eh, Peter?’

'What do I say, Andrew?' replied the farmer. 'Why, I say that the value of such a diamond would be enough to purchase right out the town of Quebec, and all the ships in the port to boot.'

'And what do I say, eh?' replied Peter Carder. 'Wall, all I've got to say is, I'd like to have that air lump o' crystal. And what might you say to it yerself, Andrew?'

'What do I say? Why, just this. I've talked a bit with our friend here down creek. He's going back to South America as soon as he possibly can, having a bit of money by him for passage fare. I'm going back with him to explore, and maybe get tons of gold and silver. And more than that, if he succeeds in getting back his kingdom, those who go with him are to have the jewelled coronet and the big diamond for their share. I mean to risk it and go, Peter, father, all of you; and what's more, *I mean to get the big diamond, the Idol's Eye!*'

Then followed a silence. Astonishment was mingled with dismay in the minds of Farmer Battel and Mrs. Battel, Ruth and Alice, who had entered just in time to hear his resolve.

All knew too well the character and disposition of Andrew to doubt that he meant what he said—every word—and that when once he had made up his mind on any subject it was only waste of time and words to endeavour to dissuade him.

Peter Carder was the first to speak. He knew his friend Andrew also, and felt sure he meant doing as he said.

'Say, Mister Last o' the Incas,' he said, in his quaint Yankee manner, 'I have heard say that down south there—about a country called Patagonia—there's some tallish people.'

He rose to his feet, and, drawing himself up to his full height, asked,

‘Did you ever see a man down there taller than me?’

The stranger glanced at him for a moment, and then replied quietly,

‘Senor, I have seen men in those regions taller than you, by at least two heads.’

‘Thunder!’ exclaimed the Yankee. ‘Why, that would make ’em about nine feet high!’

‘That is so, senor,’ replied the other quietly.

‘Jerusalem! rattlesnakes! and glory!’ exclaimed the Yankee. ‘Andrew, lad, I must have a look at those tall coves. I never did see any one yet as could come within an inch of me, and I’d like to. I always said whenever I did meet a bigger man than me I’d try a fall with him. Andrew, lad, I’ll go with you to try a fall with one o’ those tarnation Patagonians, if for nothing else.’

‘Ah!’ said Andrew, ‘but we will go for something else, Peter, my boy. If you go, we’ll get the jewels and the big diamond, the Idol’s Eye, and share them between us. Do you mean it?’

‘Mean it!’ cried the giant, reaching out his long arm, and grasping Andrew’s hand. ‘May I be rammed, jammed, slammed, and banged if I don’t go with you and Mister the Last of the Incas, if you mean going—’

‘Right,’ said Andrew shortly. ‘Bet your life, then, friend Peter, *we get the big diamond, the Idol’s Eye!*’

CHAPTER IV.

ANDREW BATTEL MAKES UP HIS MIND TO
ACCOMPANY THE STRANGER.

‘AY, there’s no mistake about it, we both mean to go. I can answer for myself, at least.’

‘Bet your life, Andrew and friends all, Peter Carder is not the man to back out when he has said a thing. If you go, and Mister the Last of the Incas here, I go too.’

Here Ruth put in her gentle protest; for, to tell the truth, in her heart of hearts she had a great liking for the great, good-humoured, honest-hearted giant.

‘I do believe you are both out of your minds. As for you, Peter, you ought to know better—you are old enough, and big enough, goodness knows, you great stupid, you! The idea of going off to South America on such a wild-goose chase! To think of two young fellows like you proposing to tramp thousands of miles all over an unknown country, among wild beasts and savage Indians! You’re sure to be drowned or starved to death, or something. So you just give up all thought of it this instant, or I’ll come over and box your ears for you, you great oaf, I will!’

‘You’d have either to stand on a chair, or make Peter sit down, to do it, sis,’ remarked Andrew. Whereat all the Battels laughed, and even the mysterious stranger smiled.

‘I’m bound to go, if Andrew does, Miss Ruth,’ said Peter Carder, ‘because, you see, I said I would. And when I put my foot down on a thing, it’s got to be done. So if Andrew goes, I go

too. Mayhap you can persuade him to give it up.'

Peter knew right well that the request would be a vain one, and Ruth herself had but faint hopes of being able to dissuade her brother from what they all thought his insane project.

She soon discovered that Andrew was not to be moved by anything she could say. Indeed, he replied to her with considerable skill and tact, endeavouring to let them all understand that there was nothing by any means mad about the idea.

As to the danger, he went on to explain :

'There's danger in pretty nearly everything a man sets about. There's danger in riding a horse, in driving a horse—danger in going about among cattle—danger in felling—danger in many other things we do every day of our lives. Of course, there'll be danger—danger in the sea voyage, to begin with, as there was when we crossed the Atlantic. But there's no danger so desperate as to daunt resolute me. Scores—ay, hundreds—of travellers and explorers have roamed in the vast interior of the great South American continent, some in search of gold, silver, and jewels—others bent on scientific discovery. As an example of the latter, witness the great Humboldt, who crossed South America—from ocean to ocean, from the Atlantic to the Pacific—on foot. If there was no spirit of enterprise in the world there would be no discovery. Doubtless, when Columbus sailed away to the setting sun to discover a new continent, many people at the time—ay, most people—thought him a madman, a crazy enthusiast, a dreamer. And doubtless, too, his own family

urged him to abandon the rash enterprise. But he persevered, and discovered America. He knew—he felt a perfect certainty that there lay a great continent far away to the west.

‘He acted on his knowledge, relying on his own energy, skill, and good star to carry him through. He succeeded gloriously, completely.

‘I, too, *know*, feel inwardly certain, that what this stranger has told me concerning a region abounding in gold and silver and jewels, and especially the Idol, with golden diadem set round with rubies, emeralds, and diamonds, and the great diamond in the centre of the forehead—I believe, I say, that all this is true. And so believing, I, like Columbus, shall succeed. My good star—backed by determination, stern resolve, skill, and pluck—will carry me through. I, with my companions who set forth on this expedition, will succeed in penetrating to this rich and unknown region. Our friend here shall ascend his ancestral throne, and we—we will get the great jewels—above all, the big diamond, the IDOL'S EYE.’

We have here only given a brief summary of Andrew Battel's speech in defence of what the others considered his mad project. But so eloquently did he discourse, that when he finished, all present were influenced, and, though not convinced, felt somewhat infected by his enthusiastic ardour.

‘Well, Andrew,’ said his father, ‘you always had an opinion of your own, and a will of your own, too. Mind, I don't say they've ever led you astray; and I suppose you'll just do as you please in this business. As to all that rigmarole about

the big diamond, the "Idol's Eye," and gates of gold, a city of gold, and so forth, it may be true, and it may not; but I'm bound to believe, from all I've heard and read, that there's great mineral wealth in South America. We all know that there are mines of copper and silver, and that gold has been found in large quantities. We know that many adventurers and explorers have achieved great wealth. It is possible you may do the same, Andrew; but I advise you to give up the thought of Idols' Eyes, diamonds as big as swans' eggs, and all that sort of thing, and stick to the more practical part of the business. If you could strike a rich copper lode, for instance, you could come back, and, with your mining knowledge, get up a company and go out yourself as managing director.'

This was very sensible advice, beyond all question; and, though Andrew acknowledged its justice, it had no effect in moderating his ardour or shaking his belief in the existence of the great treasures of gold and jewels and the big diamond, as related to him by the stranger.

'Well, father, I daresay you're right. Anyhow, there's always the chance of finding rich copper or tin or quicksilver mines in a country where we know there are quantities of those metals. Still, I hold to the other idea. You may laugh at me, and call me superstitious if you like. And I daresay you will; but I certainly have a sort of feeling, a kind of inward knowledge—call it presentiment, or what you like—that there's a vast treasure down in those regions, and that it's to be my fortune to get it. Maybe I'm wrong; possibly I shall fail; anyhow, I mean to try.'

‘Well,’ said Farmer Battel, ‘as you’ve made up your mind, I sha’n’t try to persuade you off it. Seems to me it’s no use discussing the matter any further to-night. Suppose we have this wonderful story? What say you, stranger? Are you agreeable?’

‘Yes, senor, I am ready and willing to give you an outline of my extraordinary life and origin.’

He remained silent for a few moments, buried in thought.

‘To make you understand my story at all, senors and ladies, it is necessary that I should begin a long way back—more than three centuries ago. I must begin at the time of the Spanish conquest in South America.’

‘Guess it’ll be a longish yarn?’ remarked Peter Carder.

‘I will make it as short as possible; and, with your permission, I will divide it into two parts. I have things to relate dreadful to the minds of women; and I am sure these good ladies will not care to listen to all the strange things I have to tell.’

‘Right, friend,’ said Farmer Battel. ‘I reckon, by the time you get through the first part of the story it’ll be time for the missus and these girls to go to roost. Ruth, my girl, get hot water and the whisky, and brew us a bowl of punch, as you know how. Now, stranger, just seat yourself comfortably, and blaze away.’

CHAPTER V.

THE ONE-EYED SNAKE'S STORY—SPANISH CONQUEST AND SPANISH TREACHERY.

THE stranger commenced his narration, speaking in a low but distinct tone, and with a sort of monotonous rhythm which was quite peculiar.

He did not look about him, or in the faces of any of his hearers, but kept his strange single eye fixed on vacancy. It seemed as though he had turned his eye inwards, and now only saw the scenes he was describing.

‘Perhaps you are all aware of the circumstances of Pizarro’s conquest of Peru; but it is possible that some of you are not; and as it is essential that you should understand this, I will repeat, in few words as possible, what occurred.

‘Pizarro, the Spanish adventurer, discoverer, and conqueror, landed on the coast of Peru, the wealth in gold, silver, and precious stones of which country there were afloat the most extraordinary tales.

‘With a force of less than three hundred men he boldly advanced inland, determined to reach the capital, called Caxamarca.

‘This was in the year 1532.

‘The Spanish adventurers had to march through a totally unknown country, over ranges of mountains, through swamps, vast forests, across broad rivers. They were few in number, and had but the inhabitants chosen and set to work, the Spaniards must have been overwhelmed.

‘There can be no doubt of the dauntless bravery, audacity, resolution, and energy of Pizarro,

any more than there is of his atrocious cruelty, greed for riches and power, and abominable falsehood and treachery.

‘The Spaniards, led on by their terrible leader, arrived at the foot of the vast mountain chain of the Andes, whose heights, hidden in clouds, frowning down upon them, would have been sufficient to daunt any one with less courage and determination than Pizarro. But the fierce, ruthless, irrepressible Spaniard marched on, and, after terrible fatigues and hardships, the Andes were scaled, the slope on the other side easily descended, and there, before the eyes of the adventurers, lay the magnificent city of the Incas, Caxamarca, capital of Peru.

‘It must have presented a most magnificent sight to the invaders: built of white marble-like stone, its pinnacles, domes, and principal buildings gold ornamented and gilded with gold (which in very truth was plentiful beyond belief), it sparkled like a glorious jewel amidst the plains and the hill-slopes, covered with dark-green verdure.

‘On the hills around were thousands of the dwellings of the humbler people; and thousands of white tents, looking like a flock of pigeons, settled on all sides of the City of the Sun.

‘The Inca, when he heard of the approach of the strangers, went to know their object—whether they came in peace or war.

‘Pizarro was able to understand and reply to the message, for he had with him some captured Indians, who knew sufficient of the language to act as interpreters.

‘His reply was as crafty as it proved treacherous and false.

‘He sent word in effect thus:

“Tell your master, the mighty Inca, Child of the Sun, that I come as a friend—that I have important words from a powerful sovereign whose dominions are far away over the sea. Bid him have no fear of us—he can use his eyes : we are but a handful, while his warriors are counted by hundreds of thousands.”

‘Wily words, most plausible words these, with just sufficient truth in them to disarm suspicion ; for, in fact, the band of Spanish adventurers was utterly insignificant as regarded numbers only.

‘A meeting was appointed between the Inca and Pizarro. The wily Spaniard did not choose that it should take place in the capital, Caxamarca, for that would not have suited a dark and most treacherous scheme he had planned.

‘So he established himself at a small town a few miles from the capital—San Miguel it was called. Here the meeting was to take place ; and on the morning of the 16th of November 1532, the Inca, preceded by a large guard, and accompanied by a retinue—gorgeous in gold and silver jewels, and white and crimson robes of fine fabric—set out.

‘An army of thirty thousand accompanied him ; but there was not room in the square of the town of St. Miguel for a tithe of their number to gain access.

‘And it was in the square that the meeting was to take place, as arranged.

‘The great Inca came in all good faith and honour to the rendezvous. His suite and immediate attendants were either unarmed or very poorly armed, and even the warriors of his bodyguard had neglected their weapons for gorgeousness of apparel and silver and golden armour.

‘On the other side all was prepared for the cruel treachery which was to follow—the diabolical massacre which has for ever stained the Spanish escutcheon with dishonour, and a slaughter in which even women and children were not spared.’

‘O, goodness gracious!’ interrupted Mrs. Battel. ‘I’m sure we don’t want to hear anything about dreadful slaughters and bloodshed! And here’s Ruth to tell us supper is ready in the other room. And then we womenfolk will go to bed, and you men can have the finish of the gentleman’s wonderful story all to yourselves.’

And so the last of the Incas’ narrative was, for a time, interrupted.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GREAT GOLDEN VALLEY—THE LAST OF THE INCAS.

THE homely but substantial evening repast was duly done justice to, the strange being who declared himself the last of the Incas eating sparingly, but with evident relish.

Then the womenfolk set about clearing up and making preparations for bed, whilst Farmer Battel and the ‘boys,’ as his sons were still called, adjourned to the other room, accompanied by Peter Carder and the Peruvian stranger, to hear the remainder of the latter’s narrative.

Fresh logs were thrown on the fire, a fresh supply of whisky punch was brewed, the chairs were drawn near to the genial blaze; and whilst

the fierce snowstorm howled and moaned without, the strange guest took up the thread of his story :

‘Atahualpa, the Peruvian Inca, was borne to the appointed meeting-place with imperial pomp and splendour. He was clothed in royal purple, and wore on his head a crown of massive gold, studded with gems of priceless value, even his hair being decorated with jewels and golden ornaments.

‘He was carried by fifty Peruvian noblemen on a magnificent litter, on which, again, was a most glorious throne, covered with plates of gold and silver and ivory, and enriched with precious stones, making it, as the sun shone upon it and the canopy of purple and gold, one of the most magnificent objects possible to conceive.

‘The Spaniards, by order of Pizarro, were nearly all concealed, and their leader, attended only by a priest and a few of his officers, advanced alone to meet the Inca. The priest, without waiting for permission, or caring whether the Inca could understand him or no, commenced a long harangue, urging the Peruvian emperor to forsake the religion of his nation, of his forefathers, and embrace Christianity.

‘With great difficulty the tenor of what he said was explained to the Inca, but only very imperfectly.

‘Then the Inca grew angry, and asked how he dared tell him these things—by what authority. The priest replied by the authority of the holy Bible, the Word of God, Ruler of the heavens Himself. At the same time he handed the Inca the Bible. The Inca looked at it—of course it was utterly unintelligible to him—and threw the book away from him.

‘This was the signal for the treacherous attack and massacre. The priest shouted, “Sacrilege! sacrilege!” and Pizarro followed, shouting, “Down with the heathen dogs! Fire and sword! Give no quarter!” The soldiers, all prepared, rushed from their concealment, and opened a murderous fire from their muskets. The unhappy Peruvians, unacquainted with these new terrible weapons—firearms—fled in helpless panic. The Spanish horsemen charged, and a terrible and indiscriminate slaughter ensued. The treacherous scheme of Pizarro succeeded but too well. He himself, with a score or so of his most trusty men, attacked the royal escort and guard, cut and shot them down, and made the Inca prisoner. The game was now in his hands. The people had regarded the Incas as something more than human—not only as earthly kings, but as of divine origin; and this capture of Atahualpa placed them prostrate at the foot of the cruel and treacherous conqueror. Nor did the falsehood and treason of Pizarro end here. The Inca, terrified and completely bowed down by misfortune, offered to fill the room in which he was confined with vessels and ornaments of solid gold, on condition that he should have his liberty and be permitted to return to Caxamarca. Pizarro pretended to accept the offer. The Inca complied with his part of the contract, and caused the room to be filled with treasure. The value of this vast pile of gold records afterwards proved to be more than two millions sterling or English money.

‘Of course the unhappy Inca expected and demanded his liberty; but on various excuses Pizarro still kept him captive, and set about consolidating his own power. He caused all of the

royal blood to be put to death—at least, he thought all; and when he had accomplished this, and had his foot firmly planted on the necks of the unhappy people, he consummated his treason by a foul murder—the murder of his helpless captive, whose ransom he had already accepted and taken possession of.

‘After a mock trial, the unhappy monarch was condemned to death by fire at the stake, which sentence was ruthlessly carried out. Pizarro now proclaimed that the last of the Incas was dead, and all his seed, and doubted not that his own rule would be henceforth undisputed.

‘But it happened that there escaped from the massacre and from subsequent slaughter a daughter of the Incas, and her lover, a young man, also of the royal blood.

‘One of the Spanish officers became enamoured of the Peruvian princess.

‘She was enabled to gain information of the intended assassination of all of the blood royal, and warning her lover, they made their escape, with about three thousand of the bravest and noblest of the Peruvians.

‘They took with them a great treasure, were well armed, and travelled away to the interior and the far south, guided by a bright spirit with flaming wings—the good genius of the Incas—who, through transgressions on their part, had withdrawn his protection, and so permitted the massacre and the triumph of Pizarro.

‘They travelled on and on, over mountain ranges, through trackless forests, always passing through fertile countries, where there was abundance of food and water, thanks to the guidance of

the good genius, until they came to a vast mountain range which barred their way.

‘They endeavoured to march round it, and did so for more than a thousand miles, without finding any place where it was possible to scale its almost perpendicular sides. They discovered that this mountain range was of circular form, and judged that it enclosed rich and beautiful valleys, the very country suitable for these outcasts.

‘At last, still through the guidance of the angel, they came to a country of giants, many of them ten and eleven feet in height.

‘These did not oppose their progress; but, doubtless influenced by the good spirit of the Incas, presently led them to a narrow ravine not more than twenty yards wide, the enormous mountains rising perpendicularly to a height of more than a mile on either side.

‘Through this gorge or ravine the exiles made their way to the land enclosed by the circle of mountains.

‘They found, indeed, a rich and glorious land—fertile beyond belief, lovely valleys, woods, and gentle slopes; lakes fringed with verdure; quarries of white marble; quarries of silver; ay, quarries of gold, and mines of precious stones.

‘Peru was a rich and beautiful country; but this transcended it, as does the sunlight that of a taper. I will not stay here to speak of all its glories.

‘Perchance if you, senor, and you’ (turning to Andrew and Peter Carder) ‘keep to your resolution, you may yet see for yourselves.

‘Here, then, our people finally halted, and built a beautiful city.

‘The daughter of the murdered Inca—the Princess Fala Amahata—married her lover, the Lord Cuzco, and had issue.

‘The people increased and multiplied and prospered in that glorious golden land.

‘The princess bore her husband children, and, senors’—here he rose to his feet, and stood proudly upright, as though defying contradiction—‘I am their descendant in uninterrupted succession, and so am by right, as I will some day by might be, Inca of Peru!

‘Should I die without issue, why, senors, you would see in my corpse that of the last of the Incas. This is the first part of my narrative, senors. I will now proceed, and explain to you how I have suffered all I have, and how I, the heir to the throne of the Incas, am now here.’

‘Stay, stranger,’ interrupted Farmer Battel, as the other, seating himself, was about to commence again. ‘Spell oh! as they say at sea. Have a whiff of smoke and a glass of punch, then you’ll be in fresh wind again.’

‘Ay, and if yer don’t mind, I’d like jest to ask a few questions, Mr. Inca,’ said Peter Carder. ‘Yours is a stiffish yarn. Yes, sirree, and it mout be true, bar that chap wi’ wings. He won’t do nohow, you fix it.’

‘Peter, let our friend refresh himself a bit, and then you can ask him what you like before he begins again.’

‘Right, ole hoss,’ said Peter; and so it was settled.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STRANGER SURPRISES PETER CARDER, AND
CONTINUES HIS STORY.

THE Battels talked amongst themselves as they drew at their pipes, and Peter Carder joined in with an occasional word.

The stranger manufactured a cigarette in that deft and nimble manner which scarcely any accomplish save Spaniards, Spanish Americans, and those brought up amongst them. Then he smoked on quietly, gazing straight into the fire, his one eye reflecting its ruddy glow, so as to make it look like a brilliant ruby set in his head.

After a while, having finished his cigarette, he threw away the end, and turned towards the company.

‘Senors, I am ready to continue my narrative if it has pleased you.’

‘Stay a moment; what are we to call you, my friend? Always having to say “Stranger” comes awkward,’ said Farmer Battel.

Peter Carder answered for him.

‘Why, Mister Last of the Incas; surely that’s big enough name for any one.’

‘Yes,’ said old Battel, ‘a very big name, I grant you, friend Peter—rather too big indeed for everyday use; that is just why I asked for another.’

‘You may call me Don Ramon Orizava; as such was I known amongst the Spaniards of the city of Lima. By the wild Indians, amongst whom I spent many years, I was called *Ya Roni Sarka*—the One-eyed Snake. So, senors, you can call me by either you like.’

‘Well,’ said Peter Carder, ‘considering that One-eyed Snake might seem to reflect on yer peculiarity, guess it would be perliter to call you Don Ramon. What say you, squire?’

‘I quite agree with you—Don Ramon be it.’

‘See here, Don Ramon,’ Peter said. ‘You said I might ask a few questions.’

‘At your pleasure, senor.’

‘About that chap wi’ wings, the good genius of the Incas. Do yer believe in that?’

‘Yes, why not? I was always taught to believe in it.’

‘But you never actually saw the thing?’

‘Do you believe in nothing but what you see, senor?’ replied the stranger quietly.

This was a bit of a poser.

‘Wall, now, I reckon that about corks me up. Jest one more question, Mister—Don Ramon, I mean—no offence, I hope? How did you lose your other eye?’

‘I gouged it out!’ replied Don Ramon, with perfect composure.

‘Yer *gouged* it out!’ cried Peter Carder, rising to his feet, and staring at the last speaker.

‘Yes, senor.’

‘What, yer own self?’

‘Yes, senor.’

‘Was yer forced to do it?’

‘No, senor.’

‘Jerusalem! That’s a hot ’un, anyhow yer fix it. Didn’t it hurt?’

Don Ramon replied, in the same quiet impassive tone,

‘The body was weak, and suffered pain, senor; but the spirit was strong and able to bear it.’

‘A right noble answer,’ said Farmer Battel. ‘I believe you, stranger—Don Ramon, I mean. You had good reason for so doing?’

‘Yes, senor.’

‘Jerusalem! buck-rats! and corn-cobs!’ cried Peter Carder. ‘But this is a lick. Go ahead, stranger. I’ve got no more questions just now.’

Don Ramon Orizava, as I will now call him, again took up his narrative.

‘I have said that I am descended in a straight line from the Princess Fala Amahata, daughter of the Inca Atahualpa, treacherously murdered by Pizarro. From father to son the descendants of that princess have reigned in the great Golden Valley without interruption until this century. I, too, should have reigned in due course, on attaining the age of twenty years; for my father died through an accident whilst hunting, when I was only three months old. He was the eleventh Inca since the murder of Atahualpa in Peru. There had for generations been a prophecy that there was danger to the dynasty at the eleventh succession; and to avert this, my grandfather erected the enormous image, which you call Idol, in honour of the good Spirit of the Incas, in order to propitiate him.

‘This is the image which has a coronet of gold, studded with jewels, and the diamond as large as a swan’s egg for the single eye. This and the golden crown, with the other jewels, is to be a part of the portion of those who accompany me when I return to my kingdom and mount the throne of my forefathers. As I said, I was an infant when my father died, and my mother, a young and exquisitely beautiful woman, was left a widow.

‘My father’s brother—a brave and honourable man—was appointed regent according to our laws until I should arrive at the proper age.

‘My mother’s only thought was to rear me to fittingly occupy the throne of my ancestors. She was a brave and energetic woman, as well as a lovely one, and delighted, above all things, in hunting wild animals.

‘Notwithstanding the vast size of the great Golden Valley, the magnificent forests and hillslopes, teeming with wild game, she was not satisfied, but often went on a hunting expedition far away into the wild country through the Golden Gates and the narrow gorge—the only road into our glorious kingdom.

‘Sometimes, with a splendid retinue and her body-guards, she would penetrate as much as two hundred miles into the surrounding country.

‘With fatal rashness she would often separate herself from the main body of her attendants, and pursue the chase with but a few followers.

‘Often had my uncle warned her and prayed her to be more circumspect. At last came the fatal day. A tribe of savage Indians, lying in ambush, attacked and slew her followers, and made her prisoner.

‘On all occasions she invariably took me, and by bad fortune I was with her, in the arms of the only lady-in-waiting who was with her at the time, instead of with the main body, where I, the heir to the throne, was usually left for safety.

‘The Indians got clear off to the sea-coast with their prize. The jewels my mother wore were of immense value, and were purchased by the Governor of Lima, Don Sebastian Orizava.

'Also was my mother, widow of an Inca, bought by him with her infant son, the heir to the oldest throne in the world, as slaves.'

The clock on the mantel-shelf struck eleven.

'Senor Don Ramon Orizava,' said Farmer Battel, rising, 'yours is a strange and interesting story, but I fear too long a one to finish to-night. It is always our custom here at eleven o'clock to light one last pipe, drink a last glass of grog, and then to bed. You have carried down your story to the time when you and your mother were purchased by the Spanish Governor of Lima. You will be able to finish your narrative at your ease to-morrow.'

Don Ramon bowed assent, and lighted a cigarette. As he was so doing he dropped the burning stick he had picked from the fire for the purpose.

He rose and stooped to pick it up; but as he did so the dog Bruin, which, unknown to him, was behind his chair, flew out and bit him through the hand.

Andrew Battel instantly seized the animal by the throat, and, dragging him into the room, thrashed him till he howled again.

The stranger gave not the slightest sign of pain or alarm; but, after looking at the two punctured wounds made by the dog's fangs, proceeded to suck them.

All rose and gathered around him, offering apologies for the mishap, and hoping he was not badly bitten.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SNAKE CONTINUES HIS STORY.

AFTER sucking at the wound for a few minutes, the stranger, with the utmost coolness, took from the fire a burning brand, the top end all red hot. This red-hot end he pressed in the wound made by the dog's fangs. The flesh singed, scorched, burned; it actually frizzled under the heat. He kept the hot brand on for fully a quarter of a minute; and though the agony must have been terrible, he never shrank, never moved a muscle, never gave the slightest sign that he suffered any pain.

'There,' he said, as he threw the brand in the fire, 'that is a certain cure for the bite of a dog, a wolf, or a puma. I learned it from the Indians. A little rag, if you could find me some, and some plain lard or grease. It will soon be well.'

Then, while Andrew was gone for these, he called the dog to him.

It came at once, cowering and looking terrified.

This extraordinary being then stooped, patted the dog, and said, in caressing tones, 'You must not bite me again, Bruin.'

And the dog licked his hand, crouched at his feet, and there lay.

Said Peter Carder to Mr. Battel,

'Jerusalem! whatever he is, he's a plucky 'un, is that man!'

'He is indeed a most extraordinary man. The way in which he bore the fire was really terrible. It seemed something unnatural, superhuman.'

In the matter of sleeping, Don Ramon, as we

will now call him, again gave them cause for astonishment.

An excellent bed had been provided for them in one of the spare rooms kept for guests.

But he declined to go to bed, in these extraordinary terms,

'Thanks, senor, I will sit by the embers of the fire.'

'But surely you will not sit up all night?' asked Farmer Battel. 'You will lie down and have a sleep?'

'I never lie down,' replied Don Ramon quietly.

'Never lie down!' exclaimed Peter Carder. 'Come, I say now, Mr. Last o' the Incas, guess that told almighty a big licker. No man can live without sleep.'

'You are right, senor, I cannot live without sleep, but I sleep sitting up, with my back to anything. Many, many times for months together, the only sleep I have had has been under heaven's roof only, my back to a tree. It is not worthy of the descendant of a long line of emperors to lie down when deprived of his rights—his throne. I made a vow to myself that I would never lie down until I had conquered my way back to my own country and ascended the throne of my ancestors. I have kept my vow, and, strange to say, this custom of sleeping in a sitting position—very lightly, a rat scratching would wake me—has three times saved my life. No,' he said slowly, 'I will never lie down till I mount the throne of the Incas; or until the Ruler of all things shall choose to lay me low in the last sleep.'

These concluding words of this extraordinary being had great effect on Farmer Battel.

He saw now that there was reverence mingled with the most terrible determination in the character of his guest.

He thankfully accepted a rough rug, and with this wrapped around him sat through the night.

In the morning, when Ruth, whose turn it was to light the fire, came down first for that purpose, she found that her strange guest had saved her the trouble; for, Inca though he was, he had swept up the hearth, and a good blazing fire greeted her.

Breakfast over, Don Ramon went on with his narrative, promising that this last part should be very short.

‘I have said that my mother was a very beautiful woman. It is not then surprising that the Governor of Lima, by name Don Sebastian Orizava, should be deeply smitten by her beauty. So enamoured was he that he offered her honourable marriage, although she was his purchased slave. Although my mother, widow of an emperor, would have scorned this offer as beneath her were she in her own land, she considered long and deeply, and finally consented to become the wife of Don Sebastian, he also promising to adopt me, her infant, as his son.

‘It was this last consideration which determined my mother to accept the offer of Don Sebastian. She saw no hope of rescue or of return to her own people, and so she became the wife of Don Sebastian Orizava.

‘As for myself, I must acknowledge that my stepfather, Spaniard though he was, behaved to me with consideration and kindness. I was well fed, clothed, and cared for, and received the best education which the city of Lima could afford.

‘Time passed on. As I grew to years of understanding my mother expounded to me my origin, and explained to me how it came about that she, an empress, and I, heir to the oldest throne in the world, should be situated as we were now.

‘My youth and my naturally ardent mind caused me to drink in all that she told me with eagerness, and at the age of ten years I was fired with ambition and fierce desire to obtain my rights and gain my lawful inheritance—the throne of the Incas. As to when, or how, or in what way even I was to make the attempt, I had not the most remote idea.

‘But night and day I dreamed and pondered over the wondrous tales my mother had related to me concerning her own beautiful land. And then, when I was but in my eleventh year, my mother fell sick and died.

‘My stepfather mourned her deeply and sincerely, and for her sake did not allow his kindness to me to cease.

‘Three more years passed away. I was tall and strong for my age, and delighted in the pursuit of wild game and in all manly exercises. I was just fourteen when yet another misfortune befell me. My stepfather died from the effects of a wound received in a duel with the captain of a Spanish war vessel.

‘Even now, however, I was not left unprovided for. By Don Sebastian’s will a sufficient sum of money was bequeathed for my education and sustenance. I was left to the care of a guardian until I should attain years of discretion; and so for a long time my life flowed on quietly and with little incident, save the accidents and adventures of the chase. I reached the age of sixteen years, and was

in every respect as tall and as strong physically as I am now, though my mind—my spirit had not been hardened and tempered by the fierce fires of danger, hardship, and bodily torture.

‘To all appearance I was a young Spanish gentleman. My complexion, however, was much fairer than that of the Spaniards at Lima, and there were other signs which would betray to the observing that I was not one of the Iberian race.

‘But though I lived on, and appeared to accept my position with content, I never forgot my mother’s words—never forgot that I was by right an emperor, a ruler of men; I never ceased thinking and dreaming of my far-away kingdom, and hoping some day to regain it and my rights; I never ceased planning and forming schemes—alas! wild and utterly impracticable ones, impossible even to attempt.

‘I arrived at my seventeenth year, and now there comes another catastrophe which effected a total change in my mode of life.

‘I was always a bold and daring hunter, and as I grew in years the boldness of my excursions and the length of the hunting expeditions I made increased.

‘Oftentimes I was cautioned to beware of the Indians, hostile tribes of whom sometimes appeared in the very neighbourhood of Lima. It was fated that it should be so, I believe; and I believe, also, it was all for the best—was brought about by the good genius of the Incas.

‘During an excursion, longer than usual, across the wilderness and into the rich *pampas* at the foot of the Sierra, I and my small party of companions

were attacked by overwhelming numbers of the savages.

‘Some of my companions, being well mounted, escaped by flight, others were killed, whilst I alone was made prisoner.

‘I knew not the object these savages had in keeping me alive, but supposed that it was to sell me into slavery.

‘They carried me across the great mountain-range into the far interior. But they were not to be allowed to retain me as their prisoner, for, in turn, this tribe, a numerous and warlike one, was suddenly attacked by a tribe called Rappahoes. This tribe had a most terrible reputation, and at the sound of their war-cry those who had captured me trembled, and would have fled had it been possible.

‘The Rappahoes—the most dreadful, blood-thirsty, cruel, and warlike savages in all South America—came on with fearful yells.

‘They attacked on all sides at once, and after a short resistance routed my first captors. A terrible massacre commenced, which lasted for two hours. Thirteen hundred men and women were slaughtered. Of the men, *none* was spared; only some two score boys and youths, who were made prisoners, had their lives spared. Of the women, all were killed except about fifty of the best-favoured maidens of the tribe. All the infants in arms were killed, none escaping death who were under the age of ten years.

‘And now, senior, I come to the habits and horrible custom of this tribe of ferocious savages. I have mentioned that only boys and youths were spared. There was a deep dreadful reason for this

—a custom on which the existence of this terrible tribe depended.

‘I may safely say that, as a whole, as a nation, these savages, amongst whom I passed several years, are the most atrociously cruel, ferocious, brave, and wicked men on the face of the earth.

‘The system on which the tribe maintains its strength in numbers is beyond question of most devilish cunning and wickedness.’

‘Spell oh! as the sailors say when they’re tired of the pumps on board ship. Don Ramon, you must be a bit tired. Have a rest, a smoke, and a drink of Apple-Jack; then go on with your story about these dreadful Rappahoes.’

It was Farmer Battel who spoke, and his suggestion was readily adopted.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RAPPAHOES.

AFTER a brief ‘spell,’ a smoke, and general remarks all round, Don Ramon again took up his narrative.

‘That which I am about to tell you concerning this extraordinary tribe may, at the first, seem to you impossible; you may think that no human beings could be guilty of such horrible, such atrocious wickedness; that none less wicked than devils in the flesh could so act systematically. I was inclined to believe myself that these horrible savages were indeed demons incarnate.

‘It was not all at once that I discovered their dreadful and fiendishly cunning policy.

‘I noticed with surprise, boy as I was at the time, that though there were plenty of women, mostly young and comely, there were no children to be seen.

‘Every chief had at least one wife, and nearly all those of lower grade were also provided with one.

‘But no children! Never was heard either the laughter or the wail of an infant in the camp of the Rappahoes.

‘It was a mystery to me, and I strove for a long while to solve it in vain.

‘At last the truth burst upon me in all its horror.

‘As I have said, there were women in sufficient abundance, and these women bore children; but the unfortunate infants were, without any exception whatever, buried alive as soon as born.

‘Of course, the natural question arises, how did this tribe of savages maintain its numerical strength, the natural increase being thus ruthlessly stopped?

‘The tribe was recruited in this manner. When a town or village was taken by these terrible savages, or another tribe defeated in battle, the women, and youths, and boys were spared for the time, whilst all the others who had not been killed in the fight were butchered in cold blood.

‘After the spoils of victory had been duly apportioned, the young women and boys who had been spared were subjected to a terrible ordeal. A sort of committee of taste, consisting of five principal chiefs, sat in judgment over them.

‘Those of the women who were pronounced

either too old, or not sufficiently comely for these monsters, were immediately killed.

‘With the boys a similar plan was ruthlessly carried out. Only those who were strong, active, and of good form and size were spared, the others being immediately killed.

‘Those who were thus allowed to live were not, however, to be free nor on an equality with the rest of the tribe until they had proved their valour, and slain at least *one* enemy in battle—the head to be brought to the chief.

‘But before this—before even the captive youths were allowed a chance of proving their courage and prowess on the enemy—there was yet another ordeal to be undergone: the ordeal of torture.

‘They were bound to trees, and deliberately tortured in such a manner as not to maim nor permanently injure so as to render unfit for battle, and yet inflict horrible torment.

‘I need not now specify the various kinds of torture used; fire, however, was the favourite one; the body of the victim being scarred with hot irons, melted resin from the trees, and boiling oil.

‘Naturally, this ordeal was looked forward to with great terror by such as had not passed through it.

‘There was the certainty of horrible torture, and the probability of a dreadful death.

‘For if it happened that the unfortunate youth thus put to the test gave any signs of cowardice, or cried out in the extremity of his agony, he was immediately killed—being shot to death with arrows. It was open to any who so chose to demand the ordeal before the time had expired

which was fixed by custom: twelve moons, counting from the first new moon after the capture of the victim.

‘But so terrible was the ordeal, which most of the uninitiated had the opportunity of witnessing on the bodies of others, that it was a very rare thing for any youth to hasten the day of his own free will.

‘I, however, was one of those who chose to pass the inevitable ordeal, and take rank as a man.

‘It happened in this wise. Amongst the chiefs was one who had conceived an especial enmity against me, and for these reasons.

‘It was one of the customs of this tribe to exercise the captive youth—the warriors of the future—in warlike exercises and feats of strength.

‘My turn came, and I beat all competitors with the bow, the spear, and in hurling the tomahawk.

‘The chief—Mah-moo by name—challenged me himself. I beat him as I had beaten all others; not only with the bow, the spear, and hurling the tomahawk, but also in skill and strength; for I wrestled with him, and threw him after a hard struggle.

‘This achievement of mine was greeted with loud cheers from the assembled tribe, but it excited Mah-moo to fury.

‘Ah! accursed cub!” he cried, “you shall remember this when the moon for the ordeal comes, for I am one of the torturers.”

‘I replied hotly,

“I care not for your tortures; and as for the moon of the ordeal, I claim my right and challenge it now. Do your worst, warrior Mah-moo; you

have only a youth to deal with, but, nevertheless, a better and braver man than you."

'Then I proclaimed aloud to the tribe,

"Chiefs and warriors of Rappahoe, I demand as my right, according to your laws, that I undergo the ordeal now—this day—on this very spot."'

'Spell oh!' cried Peter Carder. 'Mister Last of the Incas, you spoke about wrestling—can you wrestle?'

'Guess I can, senor,' was the quiet reply.

'Good! you shall try a fall with Andrew Battel here, if ye're agreeable. What say, mister?'

'I am willing, senor.'

CHAPTER X.

A TERRIBLE ORDEAL.

AT first sight it would appear that Andrew Battel would have much the best of it in the proposed wrestling match, being both bigger and heavier than this strange being, the One-eyed Snake.

So thought Peter Carder, himself the champion of all that part of the country in the wrestling way.

But he was both mistaken and surprised at the result; for Don Ramon cleverly threw his opponent in the first bout.

They had five bouts in all, and the strange guest gained three falls, and seemed almost certain to gain another, when his foot slipped on the snow, and Andrew threw him easily.

'Three out of five, Senor Andrew,' he said, 'I

think you proposed. Fortune has favoured me; though in strength and skill I will grant you to be my superior.'

'Nary bit o' it, Mister Last o' the Incas—beg pardon, Senor Orizava. That last back fall you won was the prettiest I ever set eyes on. Darned if yer mustn't have a backbone like an eel, to bend next on double the way you did.'

'Ay, or like a snake,' remarked Andrew Battel, laughing. 'On my word, Don Ramon, I never had three better falls than you gave me this morning—clean and handsome—no mistake about them.'

'Mister,' said Peter Carder, 'give us a grip o' yer hand! I like yer forty thousand per cent better after that little specimen of what yer can do. Why, I thought Andrew here would ha' chucked yer over his shoulder most every time.'

'Wrestling, Senor Carder,' replied Don Ramon, 'was much practised by the savage Indians amongst whom I was, and I could always hold my own against the best and strongest warriors in the tribe. But I was strong and well then; now, senor, I am weak.'

'Jerusalem! if that's the way you do it when you're weak and ill, it must ha' done a man's eyesight good to see you roll 'em over when yer were in prime fettle. In the mean time, Peter, and you, boys, too, you seem to forget that you interrupted our guest in his story just to gratify your idle curiosity. It freezes pretty sharp, and it strikes me it ain't exactly the sort o' day a man would choose to strip out and wrestle—'specially if he'd come from a warm country and off a long and wearying journey. I'll have no more wrestling; so just come in, all of you. Let Don Ramon warm

himself, and, when he's agreeable, go on with his story, for I'm right down interested, that's a fact.'

This was agreed to, and in a quarter of an hour Don Ramon went on with his narrative.

'When I left off, senors, I had just told you that I had claimed my right to undergo the ordeal of torture that very day.

'The preparations were soon made. I was bound to a tree by the waist only, whilst my arms were at liberty; so that, should my fortitude fail under the extreme agony, it was possible for me to seize the hot iron or anything else used; or even, if I chose, to unfasten the bonds altogether. That hour was certain death, then and there.

'When I was thus bound, the chief, my enemy, whom I had defeated in other ways, advanced to achieve his conquest over me.

'He commenced with trifling tortures—pricking my bare flesh with thorns, flogging me with a poisonous plant, which causes blisters to arise, and also considerable pain.

'Of course I laughed at all these—laughed in his face, called him fool and old woman, till he was beside himself with rage.

'Then he proceeded hastily to the major torture, by means of hot irons.

'Once, twice, thrice I bore the agony without crying out; but the fourth time I cried aloud.'

'Ah, poor fellow, I should think so,' remarked Andrew Battel. 'You would have been more than human could you have stood the agony of hot irons searing you again and again without giving evidence thereof.'

'Ah, senor, you are wrong,' resumed Don

Ramon. 'It was not on account of the pain that I cried out, but to call the assembled chiefs and warriors to bear witness that he was torturing unfairly—was endeavouring treacherously to maim me, as well as inflict pain. My words were listened to, for already I had won sympathy by the manner I was enabled to endure the earlier torments. To burn skin and flesh and the soft parts is one thing—fresh skin and fresh flesh come in due course; but to burn tendons and sinews and bone is another—that means to destroy them. And it was this which my devilish enemy aimed at—ay, and would have succeeded too, had I not opened my eyes, which previously I had kept closed, and seen what he was doing.

'Deliberately and slowly he drew the hot iron across my foot by the instep, and then let it rest pressing against the ankle bone. I have never, even to the present day, recovered from the effects.

'You may have noticed, Senor Andrew,' he added, 'that in wrestling, on each occasion when you gained the fall I showed weakness of the left leg and ankle?'

'By Jove! that's true. I remarked it, and thought you had twisted your foot on each occasion.'

The other bowed his head, and resumed, without further remark:

'The justice of my complaint was universally acknowledged; but my enemy and torturer excused himself on the ground of it being accidental on his part.

'He was a man of note among the chiefs; his plea was listened to, and he had permission to

recommence and continue the torture for the full time allowed.

‘Then I spoke, and ridiculed him for his clumsiness.

“Thou fool!” I cried aloud; “faint-hearted and feeble-handed, thou canst not even make me wince with thy clumsy tortures. Trust not thy faltering hands again—the scent of burning flesh frightens thee; woman, not warrior, thou shouldst be called. Trouble not thyself further; give me the hot iron. Tell me how to torture myself, and I will do it better than thou—craven that thou art!”

‘These bold words of mine excited the interest and wonder of all who heard them; and as I had heretofore borne myself well under the ordeal, there were many who wished I might be victorious over this cruel chief, my enemy.

‘He noted the disposition on the part of many of the tribe, and thought to cow me by a proposal which he deemed it was impossible I could carry out.

“You will carry out your own torture according as I tell you?” he said, coming close to me, and speaking in so low a tone that none around could hear him.

“I will.”

“You know that there is a *sabango* waiting but for the one ingredient. It is the time of the moon, and that alone is wanting. We have slain no enemy in battle, and without this one thing fresh from the bleeding skull, the *sabango* cannot be.”

‘Slowly I gathered his meaning, but gave no sign.

“Speak on, coward,” that was all I said.

"I thought that you would have furnished what was wanted, *ya sarka*" (the Snake, for I was called the Snake even then, before the other word was added)—"and so I believe you will, for I will make you howl with pain before I have finished my office, and that without a chance of your appealing for mercy to the tribe."

"You lie!" I replied.

"You dare not yourself furnish what is wanted."

"I dare and will—release me!"

"Ha! an excuse! You hope to save your life by running."

"Then I lifted up my voice and spoke to the assembled chiefs and warriors.

"This man, unworthy to be called chief, has tried to maim me, and now he tells me that there is something wanted for the sabango to-night."

"Yes, yes!" was the cry, "two eyes fresh from the head."

"Release me and I will furnish my share."

"The cords which confined me were instantly cast loose, and bodily I was free.

"This man," I said, "unworthily called a chief, has challenged me to the ordeal. I will fulfil my part. I will give one eye, and having another left, I shall not be blind, but be of as good service as warrior and hunter as ever. I cannot, by our laws, lose two eyes. *He, that man*, must tear out one of his own to complete the sabango. And I demand that if he fail to do so voluntarily, I should have the right to tear it out."

"A shout of assent greeted my proposal.

"The chief, my enemy, now knew what manner of man (or boy rather) he had to deal with, and

would gladly have avoided the result of his own challenge.

‘But I, still smarting with pain, and determined to win, made short work of it. In two seconds I gouged my eye out, tore it from its fastenings, and held it before the assembled chiefs and warriors.

‘A shout, a roar of applause, greeted this my triumph; and instantly the silver collar, which all who had not yet attained manhood, through passing the ordeal, wore round their necks, was struck off, and I was declared a *warrior* of the first rank.

‘And that is how it happened, senors, that I gouged my eye out.’

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIGHT FOR THE EYE.

‘A MOST terrible tale—it makes me shudder,’ said Farmer Battel.

‘I hope you made the other chap stick to his bargain, and gouge his eye out,’ said Andrew Battel.

‘He was not game, senor, and declared that he meant it only as a joke, and fell back upon his being a chief and a warrior to save him from losing his eye. And when he found that was of no avail, he demanded time; but he gained little by that, for I was now released and acknowledged as warrior of the tribe, and though I was suffering dreadful pain, I did not for a moment allow my remaining eye to quit sight of my enemy. He could not escape; and at the expiration of the time, I called upon him

to do as I had done—destroy his own eye. Thereupon he appealed to the tribe on his privileges of chief, having slain more than forty men in battle. To that I replied that he might slay as many more, for that he would have one eye left still, and would be as well off as myself. And yet I offered to wager him that I would kill more men than he in the next battle, though I was but a youth. But all his pleading and excuses were of no avail; I insisted on my right to make him lose his eye, and he obstinately refusing to do as I had done, I took the matter in my own hands, and so settled it.'

Here the narrator paused, and presently Philip Battel asked,

'But you have not told us how you settled it'

Don Ramon shrugged his shoulders, and replied quietly,

'O' it was soon over, seniors; I demanded that we should both be stripped, and all weapons taken from either. This I did not ask as a favour, but demanded as a right. "Chiefs and warriors," I said, "this man, with the heart of a deer, refuses to do that to which he challenged me. Let him be disarmed and stripped as I am; then I will soon take by force that which his cowardice will not allow him to give me—I mean an eye. I will have it. I claim it as a right."

'Then there arose cries and shouts in my favour: "His words are just! He has proved himself worthy to be a warrior of the Rappahoes! Let it be as he says!"

'We were stripped, and stood facing each other, surrounded by hundreds of fierce savages eagerly looking forward to this terrible trial. The word was given, and I bounded on to him as might a

panther. Young, strong, and very athletic, I leaped on to him, and with the shock we both came to the ground.

‘The struggle was a very hard one. He fought with the desperation of terror at the thought of having an eye torn from its socket ; I fought with the fury inspired by the anguish I still endured, the memory of the mutilation I had suffered, and intense hatred of my enemy.

‘He was the stronger man, and strained every nerve to gain the victory.

‘For some time neither gained any advantage ; but after a while he began to tire, while I was as fresh and vigorous as ever.

‘The pain of my wounds—the scorching of the empty socket—kept up my strength, and nerved me for fresh exertions, as does the spur a horse when called on for a desperate effort.

‘Weaker and weaker he grew, though he still struggled and fought savagely.

‘I was bitten in many places, and bleeding from them as from my other wounds, while I had neither bitten nor struck him.

‘I fought for his eye, and I meant to have it. Therein I had the advantage ; for, besides always defending his eye, he exhausted himself by biting and scratching me.

‘But the end was bound to come, if I had fair play. Minute by minute I gained upon him.

After a time I was able to hold him down, despite his desperate struggles, and soon I got him by the throat.

‘Then I shifted my other hand—though he clutched the wrist—and worked it up to his face, and inch by inch I got my hungry fingers (I felt

then as though they were the talons of a wild beast towards his eye.

‘By a last desperate, convulsive effort—just as I was about to seize on the coveted prey—he jerked his body, and, almost rising to a sitting position, seized my hand in his mouth.

‘He held on to his grip as I am told your English bull-dogs will, Senor Battel—that is, to the last.

‘I could not make him release his hold of my hand, so I let go of his throat, and quick as thought, again turning to the back, I made a dart at the doomed eye.

My aim was correct, and I tasted together the glorious triumphs of victory and revenge.

‘He held my hand in his mouth, and gnawed it through till his teeth met and gnashed together.

‘But I was tearing his eye out, the blood from my own torn socket dropping on his face the while.

‘Ah! it was a short but terrible struggle, this last one; *he* biting and struggling desperately, I tearing at his eye.

‘At last it was over. Bleeding and mangled, I arose; but I had in my right hand that for which I fought—the eye I had torn from my enemy’s head.

‘Then there went up to the sky a loud shout from all the assembled chiefs and warriors,

“*Karango ya Roni Sarka!*” (Glory to the One-eyed Snake!)

‘And such was the name I went by ever after my desperate fight and victory.

‘So now, senors, I have told you, at greater length than I intended, how it was that I gouged my own eye out—a most terrible tale—a terrible vengeance for horrible cruelty.’

‘Yer didn’t say, mister,’ put in Peter Carder, ‘how the other one got on—the one you licked and got his eye.’

‘When they went to him, senor, to raise him, he was dead,’ replied the One-eyed Snake quietly.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SIGN IN THE HEAVENS.

AT this point in the narrative of the extraordinary one-eyed man there was a brief pause, which Peter Carder, who seemed to be immensely interested, took advantage of, Yankee like, to put various questions to Don Ramon, all of which were answered satisfactorily.

The episode of the fight for the eye, though intensely horrible, was felt by all present to be a bare narration of facts, without invention or exaggeration.

The terrible cruelty practised by Don Ramon could only be excused on the ground of the physical torture he himself had endured, and was at the time actually suffering.

Peter Carder summed up the general opinion very pithily :

‘Say, mister, you sartinly did win that fight in right down style. You’re a rare plucked ’un, but I guess you arn’t a remarkable merciful kind o’ coon.’

‘No, senor,’ replied Don Ramon, ‘I am not. Naturally, I never was of a mild or amiable disposition ; but now, after the wrongs, the injuries,

the hardships, the insults I have endured, ah! (here the one eye lighted up with a sinister fire,) 'I don't think I have any more of what you call mercy left in me than a tiger-cat robbed of her whelps.'

'Dreadful—dreadful! most horrible!' said Farmer Battel. 'I must grant, however, that the tortures and ill-usage you suffered were enough to goad even a quiet and gentle man to a frenzy of anger and fury.'

'Well, and how fared it with you after you had just won such a signal victory, and taken dreadful trophy of your struggle?' asked Andrew Battel.

'Senor, when they went to lift my vanquished and hated foe, they found that he was dead. His wicked spirit had taken flight from the body at the moment of my triumph. I was in no way blamed for this by those fierce savages; on the contrary, it raised me immensely in their estimation, and I, from a captive boy—a slave without the privilege of a free man of the tribe—I rose all at once to the rank of a warrior of the first class, a hero indeed.

'I have spoken before, senor, of the *sabango*—a sort of charm, accompanied by an invocation to the great spirit of war and bloodshed, the only god these savages acknowledged, or indeed could understand.

'The Wise Man—a sort of necromancer of the tribe—declared the ill-success attending their forays and expeditions lately was caused by the anger of the Spirit of Blood, and that he could only be appeased by a *sabango* or charm, one of the ingredients of which must be a human eye fresh torn from the socket of a living man.

‘This was a demand difficult to comply with; for we had not slain or even encountered an enemy for weeks, all the tribes through whose territories we passed having fled before the terrible Rappahoes.

‘My self-sacrifice, in tearing out my eye, was, for the purpose of the *sabango*, most opportune; for the ingredient which the Wise Man declared necessary for the success of the charm was at once provided by my act.

‘And now there commenced a series of extraordinary events, which exercised a wondrous influence on my fortunes.

‘According to the custom of the tribe, the body of the chief I had slain was burned the same night, and the ashes and calcined bones buried under the wide-spreading branches of a sago palm-tree.

‘Scarcely had this been finished than another ceremony commenced, all the details of which I need not here relate to you.

‘It was the ceremony of admitting me as a warrior of the Rappahoes.

‘No sooner was this done than there appeared a sign in the heavens, and I knew that the good spirit of our race had not forsaken me.

‘It was a sign, an order, and it was meant for me.

‘I knew it—I felt it, though it was impossible for me to say whence this knowledge came.

‘A great blazing meteor appeared suddenly in the western sky. Slowly it travelled across the star-spangled heavens, passing from west to eastward. When about half-way between the zenith and the eastern horizon, its motion became slower, and it seemed to grow larger and more brilliant.

‘And there, as we all stood gazing in amazement at this wondrous spectacle, it burst, and myriads of bright stars, like drops of molten silver, fell slowly to the earth.

‘There was no sound of any kind. The shower of stars continued falling from the place where the meteor burst for fully a minute, and then all was dark; for suddenly, even during the progress of the meteor, a haze of clouds obscured the sky.

‘At once I knew the meaning of this.

‘The good genius of the Incas thus signified to me satisfaction at the part I had played; and the stream of falling stars, on the bursting of the meteor, denoted the direction in which lay my lost kingdom—the great Golden Valley.

‘I felt then and there seized with inspiration, and, urged by a sudden and mysterious influence, I mounted on the still smoking remnants of the funeral pyre, whereon the body of my dead enemy had been burnt, and harangued the tribe:

“Chiefs and warriors of the Rappahoes, hearken now to me! The blazing ball of fire which we have seen cross the sky and burst into myriads of fragments is the good spirit of myself and my race. It was this great and powerful genius which enabled me to bear the torture—to pluck out my eye, and finally, at the cost of his life, to tear forth that of the chief, my enemy, whose funeral rites we have just celebrated.

“Now I know the purport and meaning of that blazing wonder and the fall of stars. The great spirit of my race thus points out to me the way I should go. Far away to the east there lies a glorious land, the kingdom of my ancestors—my inheritance.

"A glorious country, where the sun ever shines, where there are no cold winds, no tempests, but everywhere abundance of the fruits of the earth. Placid lakes and rippling streams; forests and mountain slopes swarming with wild game; flocks and herds grazing on grassy plains; cities of marble, paved with gold—all that the heart of man can desire.

"It is thither that my great spirit directs me—away, far away over the mountains we see to the eastward. There lies this glorious land. Let us march there, my brother warriors. I, who have proved my right to the name of warrior, and who am guided by the great spirit, will lead you. Come, then, let us march at once."

"The Wise Man or sorcerer now spoke, and his deep solemn voice was listened to with attention:

"The young warrior is right. The blazing fire in the heavens we have seen to-night is a sign—an order to march. Let it be as the young chief with the bleeding eye says. We will march to the east—march to victory; and for a thousand miles the great and terrible Rappahoes will leave their mark behind them. But first the sabango, the mystic charm, which shall insure us success and abundance of skulls. The sabango! the sabango! let the watchfires be lighted."

"Then there arose a yell—a howl of applause—and it was instantly settled that the mystic rites of the sabango should be performed, and that then the camp should be struck and the whole tribe start on the march in the dead of the night.

"Come forward, young warrior," continued the Wise Man, in loud and sonorous tones; "I, as

by our laws enjoined, will now give you a name by which you shall be known amongst the chiefs and warriors of the Rappahoes. I proclaim you a chief of the first rank, and give you this name, by which you shall henceforth be known—YA RONI SARKA (The One-eyed Snake)."

'Then there again arose a great shout of acclamation, and I from that moment was a chief, to be known in after days, to the terror of our foes, as YA RONI SARKA.'

CHAPTER XIII.

DISCOVERY OF THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

'SAY, mister,' said Peter Carder, when the speaker paused for a moment, 'guess you must be kinder dry. You have been talking to rights, pretty tall talk too, by Jehoshaphat! Ain't it about liquorin'-up time, squire?' addressing Farmer Battel.

'Well, Peter,' replied Battel, looking at his watch, 'I reckon 'tis about time we had a snack and a drain of Apple-Jack. What say you, Don Ramon?'

It is to be observed here that even old Battel, who certainly was not imbued with any of his son Andrew's wild enthusiasm, listened to the extraordinary narrative of his guest with attentive respect.

'Senor,' replied the One-eyed Snake to the question of his host, 'let it be as you please.'

'Well, then, we'll just have a crust of bread-and-

cheese, and a glass of Apple-Jack (no good brown ale to be got or brewed here, worse luck!), and then you shall go ahead and finish. How long do you think it will take you to finish your story—to bring it down to the present time?’

‘O, senor, it is very nearly finished. What more I have to say I will do in a very few words, omitting all which is not absolutely important. I have hitherto been thus minute and particular in describing the ferocity, and wickedness, and cruelty of the savage Indians in those parts, because the sencers here thought of accompanying me; and I should be sorry to lead them to suppose that any who ventured on an expedition to those parts would find a path of roses before them.’

After the bread-and-cheese—or rather corn-cakes and cheese—had been despatched, and the jug of Apple-Jack done justice to, the One-eyed Snake proceeded with his story :

‘In the dead of night the camp was struck, and the whole tribe started on the march to the eastward.

‘In front marched a thousand of the foremost chiefs and warriors, led by the Wise Man and myself; for I was now looked upon as a sort of prodigy, favoured by the unseen powers of the spirit world.

‘In the centre came the beasts of burden—principally mules, and a description of small buffalo—horses being very rare, a few of the greatest chiefs only possessing them.

‘With these, too, were the women and captured youths—who had been spared, but had not yet passed through the dreadful ordeal I had—

also all the camping materials, cooking utensils, and such baggage, provisions, and the plunder of many a foray.

‘Behind this, which was the largest portion of the Rappahoe army on the march, came the rest of the fighting men of the tribe, forming a rear-guard.

‘In this order we went on steadily at the rate of about twenty miles in nine hours, which was the ordinary length and pace of the marches.

‘On occasions, however, such as to surprise a town or tribe at a distance, they have marched for twenty hours without a halt, and in that time traversed sixty miles of forest and plain.

‘At the time of which I speak, however, there was no special reason for hurry, and we made our way at a fair pace through the trackless forest, guided by the stars, of which we could occasionally catch glimpses through the leaves and branches of the wide-spreading tree-tops.

‘The solemn stillness of the great forest, broken only by the tramp of many feet, and the crackling of breaking branches; the gloom of night, just tempered by the dim light of the stars; the stillness—the grandeur of the scene, all impressed me powerfully, and to this day I shall remember that march through the primæval forest—probably never before trodden by man—when other later and more stirring scenes are forgotten.

‘As I have said, I and the Wise Man were the leaders, marching in front, attended by twenty chiefs.

‘Just as a faint, dim, gray light on the eastern horizon right ahead proclaimed the approach of dawn, we reached the outskirts of the forest.

‘We had been going steadily uphill since the commencement of the march, and, as we passed the last group of great trees, arrived at the summit of a mountain spur, part of a low range of hills.

‘Beneath we could see the many valleys, gorges, and mountain slopes, gently sweeping away down to the undulating plain, which, by the dim light, I could just distinguish in the distance.

‘Minute by minute the gray light in the east grew till it blended with the starlight, and so, slowly, the view began to be unfolded before our eyes. I was gazing out in rapt admiration on the scene—beautiful, not only by reason of the landscape, but from the solemn calm, the deep quiet which prevailed, as though all Nature slumbered.

‘Thus gazing, and watching the slow, almost imperceptible, change from night to day, which was going on before my eyes, I thought I perceived some faint sparks or glimmers of light on the margin of one of the many valleys between where we stood and the plain below. Looking closer and more attentively, I was certain I was not mistaken.

‘What could it be?

‘Lightning-bugs, or fire-flies?

‘No—it was far too distant for that to be the cause; and looking intently—using all the power of vision which seemed to be concentrated in my remaining eye—I clearly made out scores of red spark-like spots.

‘And also I could, by the conjoined aid of the dim dawn and the starlight, discern dark objects so placed and in such regular order, that I felt sure it could be no natural disposition of shrubs or rocks, but was the work of human hands. At once

the truth burst upon me. Touching the Wise Man on the shoulder, I pointed with my finger:

"What do you see there?"

"The mountain slopes and valleys."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing more."

"My heart leaped within my breast, for I felt sure that my one eye had not deceived me.

"I knew that I had discovered, by means of my marvellous acuteness of vision, which the good genius of our race had caused all to centre in my remaining eye, that which would raise me to the very pinnacle of fame in the estimation of the tribe.

"A camp—a large encampment of many rude huts of boughs and bark, and tents—covering a considerable extent of ground.

"A hostile camp! for to the tribe of Rappahoes all tribes alike were enemies.

"My good genius had indeed guided me truly. The meteor and the shower of falling stars had been no false omen. It was I who had interpreted it aright. It was I who had led them through the trackless forest to this spot, whence I at least could see an encampment, within which all were as yet buried in sleep.

"It was the last embers of their camp-fires whose dull red glimmer my keen sight had discerned.

"Little did they dream in that dark valley, over which still loomed the shadow of night, that the Rappahoes, the terror of all the tribes around for half a thousand miles, were within sight, and able, in a few minutes, as the day dawned, to look down on their camp, like wolves looking down on the sheep-fold.

‘I waited till I was quite certain, absolutely and beyond all doubt, and then again I called attention to it.

“What do you see?” I asked, pointing to where I plainly enough made out the great encampment, each moment becoming plainer to my vision.

“No more than before—what see you?” was the reply.

“I see a large encampment of tents, and huts of boughs and bark; and can see too, still, the red glow from the embers of last night’s camp-fires. There is a large tribe encamped there.”

‘The old man gazed, and replied, “There is nothing; the loss of one eye causes the other to mock you.”

‘I said nothing to him, but called the twenty chiefs around me.

“Chiefs of the Rappahoes!” I said, addressing them, “I have led you through the trackless forest to good purpose. It was not in vain, or to make fools of great warriors, that the good spirit of my race sent the blazing fire-ball across the sky, and so showed me whither to lead you. It was I who read the heavenly message aright, because it was to me that it was addressed. Behold! look forth whither I point. An encampment, a marching town, containing many warriors. As yet they sleep the sleep of the unwary, and know not that the *Ya Roni Sarka*, the One-eyed Snake, and the chief of the Rappahoes look down upon them.”

‘They gazed long and earnestly.

“I see nothing,” said one.

“I see nothing,” said another. “There is naught there but the trees and the dark shadows of the mountains,” said another.

"There is nothing," said the Wise Man; "the eye of *Ya Roni Sarka* deceives him."

"I smiled. I could afford to smile; for each moment the light grew, and I knew that they must see it, all of them, before long.

"My eye mocks me not; what I see I see. Wait, warriors, wait and watch, and you will see also."

"The confidence of my words and manner caused them all to gaze with the most eager attention, while I also, to whom the whole landscape was now plain, stood by and waited.

"Presently a young chief, noted for the quickness of his vision, and called Eagle Eye, gave an exclamation:

"I see, I see! *Ya Roni Sarka* is right."

"Then another, after an interval, cried also,

"I see. There is a camp."

"Then Eagle Eye cried out,

"It is a camp of our old foes, the Han-kans, whom we have defeated in battle."

"Then all at once there arose from all the others of the twenty chiefs cries of,

"I see, I see!"

"And after this they turned to me, and the chief of all, the head of the tribe, said,

"Glory to *Ya Roni Sarka*. His words are the words of wisdom; his eye does not mock, but is keener than the eyes of all the warriors of the Rappaboes. Brother chiefs, the foe, the prey lies before us. The heaven-gifted warrior and chief, *Ya Roni Sarka*, has led us to them and disclosed them as they slept. It is he who shall lead us to the attack and victory. See, now that it is light, see how the tents stand clustered; see the palm-

leaf-covered huts for the women and children of the Han-kans. But it is not the Han-kans alone; there are other tribes. I see now the black and yellow standard, Sah-mok-tas. There are many tribes—old antagonists of ours, often overthrown in battle by the Rappahoe warriors—now banded together to fall upon us unawares. But the heaven-gifted warrior and chief, *Ya Roni Sarka*, who knows not pain, fears not death, whose eye can see through a mountain, led us to them, and showed them to us whilst they slept. It is he who shall form the order of battle, and lead us to the attack. *Ya Roni Sarka* is chief of the Rappahoes till the sun sets, and if I fall in battle, by the laws of our tribe I proclaim him chief in my stead. Warriors of the Rappahoes, I have spoken.”

‘Then the Wise Man spoke,

“The chief has spoken well; let it be so. *Ya Roni Sarka* shall lead you to the attack. Long live the chief! Long live *Ya Roni Sarka*!”

‘And the twenty chiefs repeated the words of the Wise Man, according to the custom of the tribe; not shouting loudly, but in deep low tones.

‘And I found myself chief for the day of the most warlike and terrible tribe in all South America.

‘Truly I had not torn out my eye to no purpose.’

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RAPPAHOES REACH THE ENCAMPMENT.

‘SENORS,’ said the One-eyed Snake, after a pause, ‘I have to ask pardon; I meant to have

finished my story in fewer words : but when I began to talk of those times the memory of old triumphs came back to me, and my tongue outstripped my discretion.'

'Nary bit of it, Mister Snake-Eve,' cried Peter Carder, who, at first scornful and disbelieving, was now the most deeply interested of all. 'This hyar you're a-reeling off to us now is what I call a yarn, and no mistake. *Darned if I don't begin to believe in yer !*

'Thanks, senor,' replied the One-eyed Snake, and at once proceeded.

'The news that I had led the tribe direct to an encampment was received with great acclamation. Hungering as they were, all of them, for fighting—for slaughter, for human heads, plunder, and all the horrors, for the sake of which alone these dreadful savages lived—I appeared to them a hero, a demigod, and for the time my ascendancy was absolute and complete. Whether it would remain so, I well knew depended on the issue of the approaching battle.

'To me was left everything, and I acted not according to immemorial custom as the chiefs of the tribes would have done, but in a contrary manner.

'The chief, who for the day resigned in my favour, looked astonished when I told him how I meant to attack.

'He would have led his forces down the slope, and approached as nearly as he could to the enemy without being observed.

'Then with the well-known battle-yell of the Rappahoes he would have rushed upon the foes. They would have fled, scattered like sheep before the wolves, if taken utterly unawares.

‘But if, as often happens in savage warfare, the party supposed to be taken unawares should really be on their guard, and only “foxing,” as the saying is, or playing the arifful game, then it would be a very different affair—at the best a bloody battle, in which many warriors on our side must be slain. And, moreover, the increasing light revealed more and more the strength of the enemy.

‘They outnumbered us at least five to one, to judge by the number of huts and tents in the encampment; and with such terrible odds it was possible that even the terrible and hitherto invincible Rappahoes might meet with disastrous failure, if not utter defeat.

‘To the chief who had resigned in my favour I gave two-thirds of our whole force, and instructed him to march down some ravines and gullies I saw to the level ground in the rear of the encampment. Then, when the enemy was right between myself and the small force, only a third of the whole, I retained, he was to advance to the attack.

‘I calculated that, by reason of the many ravines and irregularities of the mountain-side, he would be able to get to the rear of the valley, on a slope of which the enemy had camped, without being observed.

‘The advance to the attack, then, was uphill, and, so far, the advantage would be to the enemy.

‘But what of that?

‘Was I not on the high ground, on the other side — *Ya Roni Sarika*—with a third of the warriors and chiefs?

‘What though the first attack was repulsed, and the assailants driven headlong downhill to the plain below?

‘I foresaw that in this would be my opportunity. It was thus that I should gain a most glorious triumph.

‘But the result? Ah! I thought not of that.

‘My plan and hope was to gain the victory—allow these savages to glut themselves with gore and plunder, and then to wish them all success, and bid them farewell for ever.

‘For I calculated, and not without reason, that after a tremendous victory, I, *Ya Roni Sarka*, would be amongst the Rappahoes omnipotent. And I was determined, should the victory fall to our arms, as I felt sure it would, to take with me a score of warriors on whom I could depend, and make my way on—on—on—still on to the eastward, to the golden gates of the glorious valley, my kingdom, my heritage, my throne, which is yet to be won, ay, seniors, after many failures.

‘But the battle, the attack, and the finish, the end of it all?

‘Ah, therein I was mistaken!

‘And yet, strange as it may seem, *if I had lost the battle, I should have won!*’

CHAPTER XV.

THE BATTLE—THE MASSACRE—THE WOUNDED GIANT.

‘THE attack of the Rappahoes was as furious and sudden as of wont, and after a brief struggle the victory was complete.

‘The tactics I had adopted of dividing our force

into two bodies, one making a circuit and attacking on the other side, so as to drive the enemy uphill, answered the purpose I intended perfectly. The foe made a short stand at the camp, and, favoured by the higher ground, managed to hold our warriors at bay, the warriors who pressed on to the charge from the lower ground.

‘But whilst yet the battle raged without decisive results, I, at the head of a chosen body of the best and bravest of the Rappahoes, led a desperate charge from the higher ground.

‘The enemy was now between two fires of furious savages, mad with excitement and the dreadful thirst for blood which characterises the terrible Rappahoes.

‘The fight on the part of the enemy was soon over, and a scene of terror, horror, and slaughter commenced, such as it has been the lot of but few to witness.

‘Such was the fury of the Rappahoes, that for fully an hour there was indiscriminate slaughter, neither man, woman, nor child, old or young, being spared, when the bloodthirsty instinct of the Rappahoes seemed to have been partly satiated, and the young women and youths were spared.

‘During this dreadful hour over three thousand human beings were ruthlessly slaughtered; and of the prisoners afterwards made all were ultimately slaughtered, save three hundred young women, and about as many youths.

‘This was the most dreadful and wholesale massacre I have witnessed before or since. The ground where had been the encampment was literally soaked with gore, the huts all overthrown and torn to pieces, whilst thickly strewn over this hor-

rible field of blood were the hacked and mangled bodies of the slain. No attempt was made at burial; but after plundering the camp of everything movable, the Rappahoes marched off to a valley about a mile distant, and there encamped to rest, dispose of the prisoners, and divide the spoil. From this camping-ground the dreadful scene of slaughter was plainly visible, the wrecked and overthrown huts of the vanquished, tenanted now only by corpses—a veritable Golgotha, a dreadful village of the dead.

‘Ere long, attracted by the sickly smell of blood, there came from all quarters of the sky foul birds—vultures, the South American crow, and the like—and in two days, so well did these garbage scavengers do their work, that there remained of the dead only clean-picked bones to bleach in the tropical sun, and tell the tale to all travellers who could interpret it of the terrible ferocity and insatiable bloodthirstiness of the Rappahoes, the devouring and destroying locusts of the plains and forests.

‘After this signal victory to which I had led them, the Rappahoes all—from the lowest warrior to the chief—looked upon me with respect, wonder, and admiration; and after a short discussion I was proclaimed chief in place of the former one, who had been slain by an arrow very early in the attack.

‘I will not here stay to relate all that passed during the next week, which was held as a high festival, in honour of my exaltation to the rank of chief or king of the Rappahoes.

‘Were I to describe in detail all the incidents of the orgies which ensued—the saturnalia of vice,

of cruelty, and all bad passions—you would be both astonished and horrified that human beings could act so like fiends infernal.

‘Had I wished it, I could not have interfered to any effect, though I shuddered at the dreadful cruelties practised on the unhappy prisoners by these monsters of iniquity. To have tried to have altered their demoniacal tastes and nature would only have been to seal my own ruin; and knowing I could not stem the furious torrent, I resolved to navigate my frail bark upon it, so to speak, to my own ends and advantage—to make use of the ferocity and warlike nature of these savages, to use them to my purpose, and that purpose was one I had never forgotten, never could forget—the great glorious Golden Valley.

‘At the head of this tribe of destroying demons I reckoned that I could and would march triumphant through the land, until I should hear tidings of and come across the mountains, whose aspect my mother had so often minutely described to me. Then by force, skill, or cunning, or all combined, I would make my way to the great Golden Valley, and proclaiming who I was, ascend the throne of my ancestors the Incas of Peru.

‘Fortune, which had so greatly favoured me in other respects, here failed me—led me up to the verge of all I strove for, and then deserted me.

‘You will readily suppose that, during the confusion of the battle and the screams and shrieks and yells which I heard whilst the massacre was going on, many poor wounded wretches were able to crawl away and hide themselves in the depths of the forest and brushwood.

‘For my part, I was glad to avoid the sight of all the horrors enacted whilst there were prisoners alive, and poor wounded wretches crouching and trying to crawl away in the brushwood from their merciless conquerors. And in a great measure I was able to do so, not by reason of my position as chief, for to show any signs of repugnance to pain and bloodshed would have been fatal to my ascendancy, but by reason of my lost eye, the socket of which was now inflamed and painful. And, moreover, I had other wounds and bruises, all of which, whilst they were painful to me, were yet not dangerous, and greatly raised me in the estimation of these terrible savages; for I was able to preserve my fortitude, and never through all I suffered evinced the slightest sign of weakness, or allowed it to be seen that I was in pain; and so I was able to excuse the attendance of the warriors and chiefs whose office it was to be always with me, and roam whither I pleased, taking with me only one or two negro youths, who had not yet passed the terrible ordeal of torture, and on whom I could thoroughly depend.

‘During the conflict, shortly after the first attack, I, with my single eye, had observed amongst the enemy several warriors of gigantic stature. These, however, soon disappeared, shot by arrows, or speared, I supposed. I was sure I had seen them, sure that they were indeed giants amidst the others, and not merely men of a little larger growth. And yet, after the battle and massacre was over, they were not to be found amongst either the wounded, the prisoners, or the dead.’

Peter Carder, the long Yankee, had been paying particular interest from the moment the

narrator mentioned the tall men, leaning forward and listening eagerly.

At this juncture he spoke :

‘Guess you were wrong, then, Mister—beg pardon—Don Ramon, and what you thought was giants was on’y men little better than or’nary, like myself?’

‘No, senor, I was right. They were really giants I saw, men of a gigantic race, from nine to ten feet high.’

‘Jerusalem! Did you catch any of ’em alive? Did yer see ’em close, and have a talk with ’em?’

‘Yes, senor, I was fortunate enough to get speech of one before he died.’

‘And they was really giants, bigger and longer than me by chalks?’

‘Yes, senor; these are the people of whom I spoke to you before—a tribe of giants from Patagonia, who guarded the defile and the iron gate, the only entrance to the great Golden Valley.’

‘Thunder and squash fire! let’s have a liquor after that, Mister—beg pardon—Don Ramon. And them giants! Jerusalem! ten feet high! it’s enough to take a feller’s breath away. Bet your life, Don Ramon, if ever I come across one of them chaps, I’ll try a fall with him. And you really was close to and spoke to one of these tall ’coons?’

‘I did, senor; and what is more to my present purpose, I made an astonishing discovery. The wounded giant did not speak the discordant jargon of any of the savage tribes I had ever come across. His was a sort of mellifluous tongue, the language my mother first taught me as an infant, the language of her subjects of the great Golden Valley, the language of the ancient Incas of Peru. I

listened in rapt delight and amazement, and there opened before my mind's eye a vision of a glorious future, through the aid and guidance of this our giant prisoner.'

'Spell oh!' cried Farmer Battle. 'Your throat must be dry, s nor. I quite approve of Peter Carder's suggestion. A glass and a smoke, and then you can go ahead and finish your wonderful story.'

CHAPTER XVI.

DEATH OF THE GIANT.

THE brief interlude was taken advantage of by the Battels and Peter Carder to question their extraordinary guest on such points as were not quite clear, or which gave rise to curiosity—the Yankee harping strongly on the subject of the giants. Don Ramon, however, was able to answer promptly, and in a perfectly satisfactory manner, all questions. The effect of his story, and the manner in which he told it, was to impress all who heard it with the conviction that he was telling the truth, and narrating adventures and scenes he had really passed through.

And the further he progressed with his narrative, the stronger grew this impression.

The One-eyed Snake resumed his narrative.

'I have called these gigantic people Patagonians; not that they or their fathers ever saw Patagonia itself, which lies far away to the south of the country I now speak of, but because there was their origin.'

‘How it happened that there should be a tribe of this gigantic race so far away from the country of their race, I know not. It might have been through their roving propensities, or, perhaps, a number of them had been carried away captive.

‘On discovering the wounded giant, and hearing his plea for mercy spoken in a tongue which none but myself could understand, I was deeply affected. I forgot my own wounds and the fever which consumed me, did my utmost for the giant, urging him to tell me all he knew, and promising him life and liberty.

‘There were others also, whom on search being made we afterwards discovered wounded in the recesses of the forest undergrowth. But these were hurt unto death and were unable to speak coherently, groans and cries being their only utterances.

‘The first one I discovered I caused to be carried into camp and carefully tended for his wounds.

‘My authority as chief, and the great respect in which I was held, by reason of the universal belief in my supernatural powers, enabled me to enforce this great departure from the usage of the tribe—a law never before broken—that no male prisoner should ever be spared under any circumstances.

‘Greedy I hung on the words of my wounded giant. He spoke but little, and that in a slow drawling manner, which accorded ill with my impatience. He was very weak from loss of blood, and besides was, I think, by nature slow and ponderous of thought as of body.

‘Once only he showed any sign of excitement. He seemed a little surprised when I addressed him in a tongue he could understand, that taught by

my mother, the grand old language of the ancient Peruvians. I asked him who he was, and whence he came, and warned him, under penalty of instant death, to speak the truth.

‘His reply was slow, deliberate, and precise.

“I am one of the great men of Lotosongo; guardians of the outer Iron Gate leading to the Golden Gate of the great Golden Valley.”

‘My heart beat fast and furiously as I listened to these words—words which seemed to indicate that I stood on the very threshold of success, that my wildest dreams would be realised, and that I should mount the throne of my ancestors, Incas of Peru. A violent spasm of pain convulsed the huge frame of the wounded giant; and when it passed off I saw the death change come over his face, and I knew that he was dying.

“Speak to me!” I cried. “Tell me all you know.”

“Who are you?” he asked, in a hollow voice, still in the same slow ponderous manner. “You speak the tongue—of—our—master—to whom—we—are—bound—for—a—thousand — years — I mean the Inca.”

“I am the Inca!” I cried, “son of the empress who was captured years ago. She was sold as a slave to barbarians on the coast. She is dead now, but before then she told me all, and taught me the language of herself and her own people. She told me of the Golden Valley—of the glorious land contained within those mountains. She told me of the golden gates; and she told me of the iron gates, of which you and yours are the faithful guardians. Speak to me, slave! Speak to the Inca, who now commands you!”

‘These words of mine had a wondrous effect. Fresh life seemed to be breathed into the giant. His large ox-eyes seemed to dilate and grow brighter; a ruddier colour came to his tawny cheek; he raised himself on one elbow, and gazed hard at me, his gigantic frame trembling with excitement.

“Let — me — have — light,” he said slowly. “Let me look at this chief!”

‘There was a matting across the doorway of the hut where he lay, and at a sign from me this was rolled up, and there was abundant light.

‘Again he looked hard and long, and, raising his hand to his forehead, in token of obeisance, said,

“Great Inca, your humble slave, one time guardian of the iron gates leading to the golden gates, salutes you! I, the second chief of the Lotosongos, about passing through the gates of death, salute you. I know you. I see in you the son of the empress; I see her face in yours. I know I speak to the Inca. Death chokes me—I can speak no more. If any of our people live, give them the pouch you will find in my tunic; there is writing there—writing from the Golden Valley. It will tell why we came here, and they will lead you to the Iron Gate.”

‘He fell back gasping for breath after pronouncing these last words, as though the effort had been too much for him.

‘I, knowing that the others were dead, and frantic at the thought of being baulked by grim death at the very moment when I was about to learn all I wanted, knelt by his side, and, raising his head, called to him in a loud voice,

“Son of the Lotosongos, answer me now, I charge you. Give me a landmark—a landmark by

which I may find the Iron Gate at the entrance to the Golden Valley. It is I, the Inca, who speak."

'For a time he again revived; again fire came to the blazing eyes; life to the features which had already begun to set hard and rigid in death.

"Back—to—the — setting — sun — this moon — two mountains afar off—two peaked—one in between — flat — on — summit — smoke — fire — mountain—middle—four days' march—go north—great river—then to rising sun two days—Iron Gate —look in face of rising sun."

'A few more words the wounded giant gurgled forth, and then fell back into the embrace of Death the conqueror. Could his life have been saved, he would have led me direct to the Golden Valley; even if his life had been prolonged for a few minutes, he could have given exact directions how to reach the land of the Iron Gate, and my task would have been easy. But he died—died, and left no further clue than those few last words, and the writings he spoke of, which I found in a small pouch strapped across his breast.

'He died, and I buried him with all honour.

'He died, and after his death I discovered that I had won a victory disastrous to myself.

'I learned from the characters traced on the thin inner bark of the tappa-tree, that if the Rappahoes, whom I had led to victory, had been defeated, and I myself made prisoner, I should have been carried in triumph to the Golden Land, and there have been welcomed with frantic joy as the lawful heir to the throne—the lineal descendant of the last of the Incas.

'He died; and my heart died in my breast.

'Youth as I was, never till then had I felt

despondent—never till then did I know how bitter it is to have the cup dashed from the lip on the eve of quaffing the coveted draught.’

The One-eyed Snake was silent, and let his chin fall upon his breast. Even his eye, extraordinary for brilliancy, seemed to become dull and spiritless.

But this lasted a very short time.

As if by magic, the inner fire seemed to light up again. He rose to his feet. His face seemed to glow, and again that wondrous eye was all ablaze.

‘But though I sustained a bitter loss then, seniors, *all* was not lost—*all shall be won*. See here, on my breast, tattooed in with my own hand, are the directions and the landmarks, and much more relating to the Golden Valley.’

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SUBTERRANEAN RIVER.

THE One-eyed Snake stood up at these words, and baring his breast, they could all see that it was scored all over with lines, and dots, crosses, and many other marks on the left side, while on the right were strange figures, arranged regularly in rows which seemed to be writing in a strange language. On my left breast I have carefully marked a general plan of the country for hundreds of miles in every direction, to the best of my knowledge and judgment.

‘I have marked all the mountains conspicuous afar off, either from their height or shape of their summits.

‘I got sight of the two peaked mountains, and the one with a flat or table summit, from which came fire and smoke.

‘They are marked down here, not as described to me by the dying giant, but nearly in a line together; for I was much further north, and could not view them with my “back to the setting sun.”

‘It was one very clear morning, and I, at the top of a lofty sierra, could see before me, across a valley some twenty-five miles broad, a chain of hills loftier than that on which I stood.

‘And beyond these—far, far off in the blue distance—I could just discern the summits of these other mountains spoken of by the wounded giant.

‘There they were, beyond all doubt, the two mountains with the conical peaks, and the one with the flat table-land top between them.

‘Instantly I felt almost certain that I had discovered what I sought; and while I gazed, as if to make assurance doubly sure, I presently discerned a thin dark streak ascend upwards from the centre mountain, and spread itself out presently like the branches of a tree.

‘It was a column of smoke as spoken of by my informant; and now I felt absolutely certain that I had found a principal landmark to point out to me the direction of the great Golden Valley.

‘At once I resolved to direct my course thither, doubting not that now the goal was almost in sight I should have little difficulty in reaching it. But, seniors, I was grievously mistaken. The mountain chain on the other side of the valley proved to be utterly inaccessible.

‘For three days I marched the tribe to the eastward along the foot of the chain, hoping to find a

gap, or, at all events, a place where ascent was possible.

‘In vain. I was forced to turn back, for the Rappahoes began to grumble, and show a mutinous spirit, which, with all my influence, I durst not disregard.

‘Still keeping close to the foot of the rugged sierra which barred my way, I now marched the tribe for four days to the west, as the mountain chain gradually swept round in that direction.

‘Still did the rocky frowning side of the mountain, at times rising almost perpendicularly, offer an insuperable barrier. We had been marching now for ten days through a bleak and inhospitable district, where there was little water and scanty vegetation.

‘Neither was there any chance of plunder, for there were no villages or encampments on such inhospitable ground.

‘Discontent now grew open and threatening in its character, and I saw that I must either resign my supremacy or bow to the wish of the tribe.

‘And this was to be led once more through the forest to the fertile plains and pampas, swarming with savage tribes, far away to the south.

‘I yielded perforce, and with a sad heart turned my back on the sierra, beyond which I felt well convinced lay the glorious Golden Valley. Not immediately beyond, but perhaps hundreds of miles to the eastward.

‘But that this stubborn and rugged chain of mountains frowning down upon me separated me from the object of my hopes and thoughts by day, my dreams by night, I felt well assured.

‘Determined to put a good face on the matter,

and maintain my command over these savages, I led them away through the trackless forests, till after after a march extending over a month we emerged on to a rich undulating plain, studded here and there with clumps of trees and small woods, and with abundant streams of water meandering across.

‘There was abundance of wild cattle and game of all sorts, whilst every twenty or thirty miles or so was a native town or village, cosily planted by the side of a stream, amidst the shade and shelter of groves of tropical trees.

‘The appearance of the dreaded Rappahoes was usually the signal for a panic and hasty flight to the unfortunate people.

‘Sometimes two or three tribes would band together and make a stand, and fight for their hearths and homes. But the result was always the same—the same dreadful monotony of victory, and afterwards indiscriminate slaughter, on the part of the Rappahoes.

‘Sick and weary as I was of so much continuous bloodshed, I was powerless to prevent it—the savages nominally under my command were mad with the thirst for blood—nothing seemed enough to satiate their dreadful craving.

‘Still I managed to retain my ascendancy over them; and on many occasions, when driven to desperation, nerved with the courage of despair, several tribes have banded together, and privately attacked us, sometimes by surprise, I have led them on to victory.

‘For two years we wandered through the most fertile districts of central South America, carrying everywhere fire and sword and ruthless slaughter;

amassing plunder till there was such a wealth of it as seriously to impede the march of the army.

‘But never through this long campaign of triumph and massacre did I allow my mind to wander from my grand object, the attaining of which was to be the reward for my sufferings and sacrifices.

‘Accordingly, when the time was ripe, and I knew that my authority was well established, that the commands of the chief who had led them so often to victory would be obeyed, I once more marched to the north.

‘This time I determined to attempt to reach the region where the Golden Valley was situated from the south to the east. Accordingly I shaped our course towards north-east, and after a month’s march again struck the rugged inaccessible mountain chain.

‘I swerved to the eastward, marching at the foot of the sierra, and eagerly looking out for any available defile which might offer a chance of a passage over the mountain.

‘After several days’ marching, the object of which was unknown to all but myself, through a dreary and desolate country, we came across a belt of forest, fertile, and abounding in springs, in birds, and wild game.

‘Seeing signs of discontent, I resolved on a plan which I thought would serve my purpose. I announced to the tribe that I had brought them here to encamp for a month, and to reward themselves for their long and toilsome campaign by rest, and by feasting and riotous living, in honour of the Great Spirit, who had, through me, given them victory and abundant plunder. This agreed well with

the inclinations of my savage army, and I reckoned with joy that I should, before a month, make expeditions and explore, accompanied only by a score or so of faithful followers.

‘I proposed to be absent from camp ten days on the first expedition, and calculated that I could march and explore a hundred miles, and return in the time. And so after a parting harangue to the tribe, in which I told them I was going away for a while, at the bidding of the Great Spirit, I set forth.

‘It seemed to me as I marched away from the camp of these terrible, demoniacal savages that the very air seemed sweeter and purer—no longer laden with the dreadful odour of blood.

‘Travelling to the east, always at the foot of the mountain, in the course of two days’ march I observed that it grew less precipitous and impossible. On the third day we came to a lofty spur jutting out into the plain. This I was enabled to ascend, and after six hours’ climbing stood on the summit. My exertions were well rewarded, for again I caught sight of the landmarks—the two conical mountains, and the flat-topped one, with a column of smoke ascending therefrom.

‘Again my heart beat high with hope, and after making careful observation and notes of the bearings and appearance of the landmarks, I hastened down to the plains and again pushed on to the eastward.

‘Gradually, but surely, the mountains grew less rugged and precipitous. Gullies and defiles began to appear, along which it was possible to ascend half-way to the summit. Still, however, there came to my observation no spot whence I thought it practicable to attempt crossing.

‘All at once, on rounding a low spur which came out into the plain, we came across a broad and deep stream flowing from the mountain range.

“This river flows through the mountain,” I cried aloud, in my enthusiasm. “There must be a channel through which it flows, and, marching by the bank, we shall be able to follow its course.”

‘Panting with excitement, I traced it along up to the mountain’s side, and there a surprise awaited me. Instead of flowing, as I had expected, through an open winding channel in the mountains, I beheld the river come rolling out from a great cavern.

‘From out its glowing depths the stream came rolling and rushing impetuously, but with a steady uniform motion. Listening, I could hear far in the interior the wash and low murmur of running water, which the echoes of the vaulted roof rendered plain.

‘The river, then, flowed through the mountain by a subterranean channel. Instantly it struck me that, failing all other hope of reaching these terrible mountains, the regions beyond might be reached by navigating this subterranean river in a large and properly constructed boat or raft.

‘The idea was a daring one; but the more I thought of it the more I was convinced of its possibility—the more firmly I was resolved, failing all other means, to attempt it.

‘Another remarkable fact about this river issuing from the bowels of the mountain was its colour—a clear orange yellow—when viewed by the moonlight.

‘Not thick or muddy, but a transparent golden yellow; and as I looked and wondered, I could not

help connecting this strange tint of the water with the precious metal gold; though, on reflection, I knew that gold could by no possibility colour water.

‘Nevertheless I felt inspirited by this strange phenomenon. It seemed to me a good omen—a token that the river flowed from the Golden Valley, and that I was on the right scent.

‘At present of course it was impossible even to think of ascending the river, as we had neither boat nor raft nor the means of constructing one.

‘Accordingly I resolved to cross the river, which we did easily enough by means of inflated bullock-skins.

‘Then again I pressed on to the eastward, though slowly and difficultly, for the ground was low and swampy, and a rank growth of manganese, brush, and rushes greatly impeded us. As we progressed, I noticed with joy that the character of the mountain range changed entirely. It grew more sloping, with gullies and ravines running up in all directions, and I felt sure that before we had gone many more miles, I could successfully attempt the ascent.

‘Resolved to make the essay in the morning, having arrived at what I thought a favourable spot, we pitched our small tents, and feeling weary and drowsy, I lay down to sleep.

‘When I awoke and struggled to my feet, I was giddy, and my eyesight was dim. Presently, endeavouring to walk, I fell heavily to the ground; the dreadful tropical fever—the Manx fever—had seized upon me in its worst form.

‘I soon became unconscious; how long I remained so I know not.

‘When I recovered consciousness, I found

myself a prisoner in the hands of strange savages, who were carrying me along towards the east.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SNAKE CONCLUDES HIS STORY—CARDER'S RESOLVE.

'ONCE again had Fortune, which had so often favoured me, proved fickle and deserted me, just as I was on the eve of realising my hopes and dreams of ambition.

'Of all that occurred—from the date of my recovery of consciousness up to the time when I escaped from slavery and crossed the boundary into free Canada—I hate either to think or talk of. And, besides, it bears not at all on the one subject which concerns us, Senors Andrew Battel and Peter Carder—the Golden Valley. Whereas, all the horrors I have been relating of the cruel and bloodthirsty customs and laws of the savages amongst whom I was thrown bear directly upon the subject which I at least have at heart. For it must not be forgotten that, in order to reach the Golden Valley, we shall have to pass through at least some of the regions of which I have spoken.

'I will now, in a very few words, bring down my story to the present time. I was carried captive down great rivers always to the east, and handed over often from tribe to tribe, I suppose, as an article of merchandise. Finally, we came to the sea, north of the Antarctic Ocean, on the coast

some two hundred miles south of the mouth of the Amazon. Here was a small Brazilian port, and after being detained in prison for some days, I was sold as a slave and set to work on an *engenho* or sugar plantation.

‘Three times I endeavoured to escape, and three times I was caught, brought back, and scourged. Then my owner, finding he had a stubborn nature to deal with, took me into the town in irons, and sold me to the owner of a Spanish brig bound to Savannah.

‘Here I was landed, again sold, and sent up the country to work on a plantation with seven hundred other slaves.

‘I made four attempts at escape; but Fortune seemed now to have deserted me utterly, and each time I was recaptured, hunted down, and on the last terribly wounded by the fangs of the blood-hounds the Spaniards used to hunt down fugitive slaves.

‘Then for two years I remained quiet, apparently, but all the time I was working like a mole in the dark, exciting and organising a conspiracy to break out into insurrection, kill all the Spaniards, and achieve our freedom. I might have succeeded—it is hard to say; but I and some score others of the ringleaders were betrayed and denounced. Had we not been slaves we should have been hanged, all of us; but being slaves, we were too valuable, and so our master sent us down to Havannah, where we were sold to a slave-dealer, and shipped off to New Orleans.

‘On a Mississippi cotton plantation I remained for three more weary years, always watchful, always anxious for a chance of escape, however

desperate. But my master, warned of my character, was also watchful, and I, warned by experience, was too prudent to risk another attempt until there should offer a fair chance.

‘At last it came. I made the essay. I risked my life, I risked all—the torture of the lash. For a week I lay concealed in a swamp, living on roots and stagnant water, and after a three months’ journey I crossed the frontier, and set my foot on the free soil of the British Empire.

‘And, senors, here I am at the end of my story, which has been far too long a one. I have only now to explain to you the meaning of the written characters tattooed on my breast, of the landmarks, and the outline map, which can only be effaced by my death. Then, senors, it will be for you to decide.

‘For me, I must go. It is my destiny, I do most firmly believe, to achieve success in this my next attempt to reach the Golden Valley. I have been tortured, I have endured hardship, I have fought my way through desperate peril and difficulty. Again I am prepared to suffer, to struggle, to fight, to risk my life, no matter how desperate the venture, and my reward, I hope and believe, will be the throne of my ancestors, Incas of Peru.

‘Senors, I have finished my story of the past. The future lies all before me, and before those who choose to make a bold venture for a glorious prize. Say, now, at this moment, whether you, Senor Andrew, and you, Senor Carder, will join me in this attempt to win my own—to you the diamonds, rubies, and emeralds; to me the throne of my ancestors; and again, to you, the great diamond, the largest in the world—the Idol’s Eye.’

Andrew Battel rose and gave the One-eyed Snake his hand.

'I'm with you, heart and soul, Don Ramon. We'll go, we'll see, and, like Cæsar, we will conquer.'

Peter Carder also rose, and standing to his full height, gave *Ya Roni Sarka* his hand.

'I'm with you too, Mister Last o' the Incas; and I'll conquer too. We'll make a big fight of it, and if I don't win a fall from some o' them giant chaps you talk about, why, my name ain't Peter Carder, and I warn't reared in New England, down east. Yes, sirree, by thunder!'

And so it was settled, with but little further discussion.

CHAPTER XIX.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE JOURNEY TO THE GREAT GOLDEN VALLEY.

AND now we must make a leap in our story of a considerable period—time enough for our three stout-hearted adventurers to make nearly all the preparations regarding outfit, equipment, arms, ammunition, &c., requisite for such an expedition.

To Andrew Battel was due the merit of inventing a most extraordinary machine for travelling, which could either be used as a boat or a light wagon.

The One-Eyed Snake, although he did not originate the idea, and, in fact, was at first rather doubtful, warmly supported it, and rendered his

best assistance in the construction when he began to understand all about it.

In the first place, Andrew, with the aid of the others, built a small, flat-bottomed river boat, or punt.

It was about fifteen feet in length, and very nearly four in breadth.

The fore part, for about three feet, was in a sloping direction, and the stern also, but in a less degree.

Thus there was about ten feet of level floor, the head and stern rising.

Most people have seen a punt, and know that these somewhat clumsy but useful boats have what is called a well, in which fish, when caught, can be kept alive.

Punts, indeed, in this country, are chiefly used for river fishing, their flat bottoms and stability making them excellent for that purpose.

This well is simply a water-tight compartment, extending across the punt, and about two feet wide.

Being covered over with a lid, lifting off and on, it forms a seat, and, indeed, looks as though it were meant for one. Holes are bored in the bottom and sides of this, admitting a constant supply of fresh water.

Thus the fish placed therein are as well off as if in the river, except that they are prisoners.

Now Andrew Battel did not want this well or water-tight compartment to keep live fish in; nevertheless he required it to be water-tight, for he bored on each side of the punt, close to the bottom, two round holes, each about an inch and a half in diameter, and exactly opposite to each

other. The edges of these he carefully hardened by fire, and protected by sheet copper.

Peter Carder, who, from a whim, Andrew Battel resolved to keep in ignorance of the design and proposed use of this construction, was completely puzzled by this latter arrangement.

'What on airth's all this about, Andrew?' he asked; 'what do you mean to make o' this hyar thing, anyhow?'

'Why, don't you see, it's a boat.'

'Wall, it air a kind o' boat, I suppose; but sartinly the most curiousest specimen I clapped eyes on. I s'pose it'll float?'

'Float! Ay, Peter; maybe this strange-looking thing may float us and all our belongings many a hundred miles up the great rivers of South America.'

'Don't want it to float me,' said Peter, looking at Andrew's handicraft as though it were some strange beast, 'guess I'd rather walk along the bank.'

'Wait till we get out there, old boy,' remarked Andrew. 'I reckon you'd soon get tired of stalking along the muddy, rugged river bank, on those long legs of yours, when you saw us quietly sailing up the river. Anyhow, you shall see how the old craft floats, presently. Just you go down to the township. Call at the store, and see if they've got that canvas, and the untanned buffalo leather that Indian trader promised to leave there. Then look round and see if those axes are ground; then round to the blacksmith's, about the files and other things, and by that time we'll be there with our boat.'

'Why, yer ain't going to carry it, surely?' said

Peter Carder ; 'it's small, but heavyish, and it's a good mile to the township.'

'Carry it? not likely,' replied Andrew Battel, 'it's going to carry us.'

'Going to carry you?' asked Peter Carder, quite bewildered.

'Yes, certainly,' was the reply. 'But you go on—we'll come to you, and then you'll see all about it.'

Peter Carder, never very brilliant, and now quite bewildered, took the suggestion, and walked off, wondering what on earth his comrades were up to.

Arrived at the township, he executed his various commissions, bought himself some nigger-head tobacco, had a 'liquor' at the store, and then sauntered up to the blacksmith's. Having finished with that worthy wielder of the hammer, after having challenged him to 'try a fall with him,' he seated himself on a log outside, lighted his pipe, and pulling out his knife, commenced 'whittling' in the Yankee fashion.

He had been thus profitably employed about half an hour (making a lot of chips, and nothing more), when, looking up, he perceived in the distance a vehicle approaching down the plank road. After a bit, he could recognise the Battels and the One-eyed Snake thereon.

'What on airth is it?' he muttered to himself, throwing away his whittling-stick, and staring hard. 'It ain't the bullock-dray, nor the light horse-wagon, nor yet the buggy. Je-ru-sa-l-em! I ken make out the old pony, and the boys a riding, but what on airth they're a riding on I don't know.'

And it was not until they pulled up outside the

blacksmith's shop that he discovered what it really was.

'Wall, may I be knocked into a cocked hat if this ain't a lick. Why, it's that darned ugly little boat they've been a-tinkering up.'

'Now then, boys,' cried Andrew to his brothers and the Snake, 'off with the wheels. You take the pony out, Philip, and hitch him up here. Come, Peter, lend us a hand; don't stand gaping there.'

In a few minutes the wheels were off, the iron axletree, which went through the well already described, removed, the pony taken out from the shafts, and the shafts themselves taken from the iron sockets into which they fitted and were fastened.

The strange vehicle was now and again a boat. The shafts, which were so made as to form mast and yard to spread a sail, were placed in the boat, and then Andrew, who took the lead, said,

'Now, boys, there are five of us—two at the head and two at the stern; then there'll be one to give each of us a spell in turn. We'll just walk her down to the lake, and all have a sail in her. First we'll christen her though, and her name shall be the "Idol's Eye."'

'Thunder! you don't mean to say you're going to get inside that thing, and out on this lake?' said Peter Carder.

'I do, though,' replied Andrew Battel; 'and, what's more, Peter Carder, that ugly little boat, as you call her, will float us safely hundreds, ay, thousands of miles up vast South American rivers, and with wheels on, and horse, bullock, and ourselves dragging, will carry our baggage over many a broad plain, over many a mountain range, through

hundreds of miles of virgin forest, till we pull up at the entrance of the Great Golden Valley—the iron gates.’

Prophetic words!

CHAPTER XX.

TRIAL TRIP OF THE WAGON-BOAT.

WE promised our readers at the commencement of the last chapter, that we were about to make a leap in time and space, and transport them to other scenes.

The episode of the strange punt-wagon, however, somehow led us from our design.

Now, however, after a few parting words regarding this nondescript construction of Andrew Battel’s, we will keep our word—take flight to a quiet little Massachusetts village, and introduce to our readers another character, perhaps the most extraordinary of all our personages—this no other than Samson Von Burr, known as the Copper Dutchman.

The punt was duly launched on the lake, and Andrew Battel proceeded to perform the time-honoured ceremony of christening the strange craft.

This done, all embarked, though it was not without much doubt and misgiving that Peter Carder adventured his long frame on board.

The rudder was quickly shipped, one of the shafts set up as a mast, whilst the other served as a yard to extend a lug sail, which was quickly spread to the wind.

This first experiment was quite successful; and notwithstanding the small size of the little vessel, and the weight of the five of them, she skimmed along the lake in capital style. Andrew Battel discovered that, though the five of them weighed together quite a third of a ton, yet she only drew a few inches of water—this by reason of her flat bottom.

Peter Carder was the victim of a terrible ‘sell,’ Andrew Battel, who enjoyed a bit of fun, not failing to take advantage of the opportunity.

Peter was sitting on the well or water-tight compartment before spoken of. Presently he heard a sound like the bubbling and rippling of water, and proceeded to lift the lid.

Of course, water was pouring in through the minute holes on either side. This Andrew Battel did not object to, for he believed that water in the well would render the punt more safe, and less liable to be upset.

‘Eh!’ cried Peter Carder in a tone of dismay, ‘the boat’s leaking, Andrew; the water’s coming in!’

‘The deuce!’ said Andrew. ‘What’s to be done? I suppose we’d better bale.’

Peter Carder, like many of the bravest of the brave in all other respects, was a desperate coward afloat.

Accordingly a baler was handed to him, which he began using most vigorously.

Andrew, busying himself about trimming the sail, asked presently,

‘Well, Peter, how are you getting on?’

‘Jerusalem!’ exclaimed Peter, who was now all in a sweat. ‘I’ve been working like a hoss, and

the cussed water's a-gaining on us. Put back, Andrew. Guess we'll soon be a-sinking.'

For some time Andrew Battel paid no attention to Peter Carder's demand to turn back; but, after a bit, the tall Yankee, who, knowing nothing of the true state of the case, was really alarmed, insisted on their making for the shore.

So the punt's head was brought round in a long curve, landward.

The shore was now fully a mile and a half distant, and the wind light.

Peter Carder slaved like a nigger at baling out the well, deeming it a matter of life or death to keep the water down.

And when the head planks of the punt grounded on *terra firma*, he had an idea that his vehement exertions had been the means of saving them all from drowning.

Great was his indignation when he learned the impossible nature of the task on which he had been engaged. But as it had been his own seeking, of course he could not complain seriously.

And so ended the experimental trip and the adventure with Andrew Battel's wagon-boat.

And now for Bunkerville, Massachusetts, and Samson Von Burr, the Copper Dutchman.

It is fair time at the village, or, as the inhabitants delighted to call it, township of Bunkerville.

It is situated about seven miles inland from the little harbour of Rockport on the iron-bound coast of Massachusetts.

There are two chapels and a school-house at Bunkerville, a blacksmith's, some half score of dry goods stores, with liquor stores and two hostleries,

where, as the traveller is informed, there is to be had good accommodation for man and beast.

The rest of Bunkerville consists of wooden or brick houses, all whitewashed and prim-looking, and all shingle-roofed.

The town is principally occupied by farmers, farm labourers, owners and masters of the many store sloops which sail from Rockport weekly, for Boston; also the owners, managers, engineers, and labourers of the adjoining stone quarries. So that, with distinct branches of industry, Bunkerville may be said to be a very prosperous little township.

The friends of Peter Carder farm many score acres of rich arable land a few miles out of the little place, hence the presence of our adventurers in Bunkerville.

CHAPTER XXI.

SAMSON VON BURR.

FAIR time at Bunkerville is very much like fair time in any old English country village, notwithstanding that the broad Atlantic rolls between, and that near a century has elapsed since the original stock-founders of the American nations crossed the ocean, and landed on the New World continent.

There was the usual tumult, the braying of brass bands, the beating of drums, the loud shouts of the proprietors of the various shows, inviting the public to 'step up.'

There was the sharp crack ! crack ! of the rifles

shooting down a tube, like a gigantic telescope; the monotonous hum of the swings, merry-go-rounds, and all that sort of thing; the barking of dogs; the howling of wild beasts in the caravans—for there really were live wild beasts, some of them remarkably hungry and savage.

And, above all, the ceaseless babble of the human voice, chattering, shouting, laughing, all possible sorts of sounds producible by means of vocal organs.

The great assemblage of caravans, shows, booths, and so forth, was on an open space, which, in an English country town or village, would have been called the Market-place.

On one side of this square was the blacksmith's forge, the barber's shop, and a chapel.

On the adjoining front, a dry-goods store, a baker's, two shingle-roofed cottages, and a cart shed. Facing the chapel was the one hostelry of the place, called the Bird of Freedom, which bird was represented by a big, wooden, carved affair, holding in its beak the inevitable 'stars and stripes' banner.

In the front room, opening to the bar of this establishment, we find our friends, Andrew Battel, Peter Carder, and the One-eyed Snake.

Here they can at their ease witness all the humourous and boisterous mirth of the fair, and quaff their apple-jack or mint juleps in comparative quiet.

All three of our friends are in excellent, even boisterous spirits; the excitement and noise, the braying bands and rolling drums, supplemented, possibly, by the aforesaid juleps, &c., had tended to cause an unusual degree of excitement; even the

mysterious stranger, Inca of Peru, usually so cold and impassive, gave evidence of unwonted excitement. His brown cheek was flushed, the veins stood out on his forehead like whipcord, and the wonderful one eye gleamed like some weird gem.

There were many others in this front room, and the talk and noise was fast and furious.

Enter presently a man in flesh-coloured tights, linen shoes, which had once been white, a 'stars and stripes' tunic, and a blue riband around his forehead.

This man, besides an athletic frame, matured by many years' tumbling and acrobatic performances, had a most tremendous voice—a loud rolling bass—to which the bellowing of the bulls of Bashan would have been but as a shepherd's pipe.

Also he had under his arm a bundle of bills or playcards, which he distributed to the company, employing his voice all the while as auxiliary.

'Now, noble sportsmen, is your chance; never again, whilst Columbia rules the waves, which will be for all eternity, and three weeks afterwards, will you have the same opportunity as is now offered to you in this glorious and historically-famed township of Bunkerville.

'Here, and nowhere else, can you witness the astounding feats of strength and skill to be presently performed in the Central Universal, all-the-world-round champion circus and gladiatorial arena. One dollar, noble sportsmen—one dollar only: two dollars reserved places, and three dollars for the right to enter the arena, and do as you please.'

'Wall, what's it all about, mister?' asked Peter Carder; 'what's to be seen, and what's to be did?'

‘Take a bill, squire; read it carefully, and then come and see the wonders you will see.’

‘Read it out, Peter!’ cried Andrew Battel; ‘let’s all have the benefit of it.’

And so Peter Carder, obeying, began reading out the placard in his loud, harsh, twanging voice.

Thus ran this document: ‘Central Universal Centrifugal, most magnificent champion circus of this or any other planet (comets and shooting-stars included).

‘Proprietor, Samson Von Burr, the strongest man in the world.

‘In this marvellous galaxy of grandeur and glory, you can witness the most astounding feats of skill, ingenuity, agility, enormous endurance, and stupendous strength.

‘Samson Von Burr, the strongest man, the best man, and the heaviest man in the world, will wrestle any man in the world—will fight any man in the world, or will do anything in the world better than any other living white man or two niggers in the world.

‘(Signed) SAMSON VON BURR,

‘The strongest man, the best man, and the heaviest man in the world.’

‘Jerusalem!’ cried Peter Carder, after he had finished reading this extraordinary bill, ‘but that cove’s got a nerve all his own. The strongest man, the best man, and the biggest man in the world, open to wrestle any living live white man or two niggers. May I be rammed, jammed, slammed, banged, and hanged if I don’t ha’ a slap at him. Guess I’ll put him on his back, and take the bounce out of him ’fore he knows where he is!’

'Guess he'll weigh too much for you, Peter. Heaviest man in the world, the bill says.'

'I don't care if he's as heavy as a bull elephant; so much the worse for him. I never did yet think anything of these great bloated bags o' wind!'

'Ah! but he's the strongest man in the world, too.'

'Say, mister,' said Peter Carder, turning to the man in fleshings, stars-and-stripe tunic, and spangles, 'how big's this Mister Von Burr?'

'Not so very big, but mortal strong and heavy, bet your life!'

'How high is he?'

'Guess he's about five ten.'

'Jerusalem! he must be as fat as a cow hippopotamus to weigh heavy!'

'No, sirree; it's all bone, muscle, and hard metal.'

'Metal!'

'Ay, loss. Hain't you never heerd of the Copper Dutchman before this—the heaviest man in the world?'

'To thunder and blazes with the Copper Dutchman! It's all bunkum, I swar. Now, see hyar, mister. Guess you've bin a-takin' a rise out o' me. Now jest you answer me this one question, and no lying nor beatin' round the bush; for if you tries any tricks with me, sure as the Lord made little apples, I'll break you up for firing! Now, how heavy is this boss of yours? What's his right weight, within a few pounds?'

'Wall, colonel,' answered the man in stars, and stripes, and spangles, quite coolly, 'it's hard to tell egrackly, 'cause you see it depend so much on his

temper. Now he's in pretty fairish good humour to-day, so I should say he'd weigh about a ton.'

'A ton!' shouted Peter Carder, half astonished, half angry. 'Why, man alive, you don't know what you're talking about.'

'Guess I'm right, colonel—there or thereabouts. He ain't much over a ton to-day. Yesterday he was riled, and was a good ton and a quarter, but when he's real down-right mad, bet your life he tops a ton and a half.'

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SNAKE ASTONISHES THE AUDIENCE.

PETER CARDER listened to this astounding statement, and for a time was so utterly taken aback as to be unable even to think or to feel indignant at what seemed such a tremendous lie being palmed off on him.

But he with the 'stars and stripes' tunic, fleshings, and spangles, looked him calmly in the face, and said,

'It's a fact, colonel. Don't you ever put down a thing as a lie till you've proved it. That's fair play and justice, all the world over.'

There was some sense in this, and Peter Carder saw it.

However, there were, of course, others in the room, and some of them, as may be supposed at such a time, a little under the influence of strong drink.

One man, who had evidently done a steady

course of drink—a rowdy, desperado-looking fellow—seemed to take especial offence at the statement of the mountebank.

‘You’re a tarnation liar! and here’s one for yer toplights. Guess I’ll give yer a rip with Colonel Bowie, if yer don’t make tracks.’

With these words he aimed a blow at Stars and Stripes and Spangles.

But Peter Carder, who was seated on the table within reach, stretched forth his long arm and stopped the blow.

‘No, no, mister, can’t hev that, nohow you fix it. This cove’s been pitching us a pretty considerable stiff yarn, that I du own. An,’ see here, Mr. Spangles, if I find you’ve bin a tryin’ to take a rise out o’ me, why I’ll just take my knife, and whitt’e you down thin and sharp, and use you for a toothpick. But till such time as I’ve proved you a liar, you sha’n’t be knocked about. So,’ turning to the mountebank’s assailant, ‘my bully California buck, if you want to practise your skill on Mister Spangles hyar, I guess you’ll have to begin with this six-foot-ten of blood, bone, and muscle, first. Come on, mister.’

As Peter Carder spoke, he rose from the table whereon he had been seated, and stood upright.

The rowdy took a look at the aforesaid six-foot-ten, and didn’t seem to fancy it worth while to risk an encounter.

‘Come along, Andrew, lad; come along. Don Ramon, and you, too, Mister Acrobat. Guess we’ll go down to the booth, and see what this boss o’ yours is like. Bet twenty dollars I give him a back fall.’

‘I’ll take that bet, colonel,’ said the acrobat;

‘and since you’ve been jannick enough to take my part, I’ll jest give yer a few hints that may turn out useful. Hev you got any silver about you?’

‘Sartinly,’ replied Peter Carder; ‘about sixty dollars.’

‘Then give it your friend. Don’t you go to wrestle with a Copper Dutchman, with silver or zinc about yer.’

‘Jerusalem!’ said Peter Carder. ‘Will he nail it? Is he a thief as well as a tarnation humbug, this Copper Dutchman?’

‘No, sirree,’ replied the mountebank. ‘He air a straight up, right down good man, our Boss, no barnee or bunkum about him.’

‘Well, then,’ pursued Peter Carder, ‘why ain’t I to have silver or zinc about me?’

‘Just this way: ’cause silver and copper, or zinc and copper, makes what they call a galvanic battery. Now, our Boss, he air pretty nigh half copper—copper wire, and no mistake—consequently, your silver dollars coming against his copper constituted corpus, produces a battery, and you’ll get a shock worse than a electric eel half a ton longer than the sea serpent could give yer.’

Peter Carder here seemed about to lose patience.

‘That’ll do; just you lead on, mister. It strikes me you’re pitching in a thundering lot of lies; and if that turns out a fact, I’ll just whittle you into a toothpick, or I’ll spoil my knife.’

‘Come on, my merry masters,’ cried the mountebank, nothing daunted; and our three friends, following him, made their way through the crowd, and across the square.

The grand amphitheatre, rejoicing in the grandiloquent names, was, externally, much like

any ordinary travelling circus to be seen in summer time at English country towns. In fact, it was a huge circular tent, with sundry caravans in the rear, enclosing a square space which, being covered over, afforded shelter and privacy to the members of the company—performing dogs, cats, snakes, and wild beasts in general.

Rising from the centre tent-pole was a flag-staff, on which floated an enormous banner, emblazoned with the stars and stripes, of course.

Over the entrance in front was a big picture, which made Andrew Battell's English blood tingle.

There was, of course, the inevitable eagle, tremendous in size, fierce in aspect. This amiable bird of freedom, as represented in the picture, was standing on the shoulder of a very thin and miserable-looking old lion, only on one foot, for the other was being diligently employed in scratching out one of the said poor old lion's eyes.

It is needless to say that the sick and miserable lion was supposed to be Great Britain, and the young and vigorous eagle the Young Republic of the New World.

Our three friends entered, paid their three dollars, and were conducted by the mountebank to the back of the circus, where, within the boarded arena, were placed some dozen chairs for the use of privileged persons who chose to pay the extra three dollars.

The surface of the arena was spread with tan and fine sawdust, the two together producing a strong and pungent odour. A little wicket was opened in the hoarding, surrounding the general audience, and our friends were invited to pass in.

Andrew Battel and Peter Carder were a good deal astonished—startled, indeed; as regarded Andrew Battel, I might say alarmed, on finding themselves on intimate companionship with some three score snakes of all sorts and sizes.

There they were; striped snakes, spotted snakes, and snakes with spangled skins, like harlequins; blue and yellow snakes, black and green snakes, white and purple snakes, all-black snakes, chequered snakes, pepper-and-salt snakes, brown-coloured snakes, dust-coloured snakes, mud-coloured snakes, snakes with glistening scales, snakes with smooth skins, like eels; flat-headed snakes, horned snakes, hooded snakes, white-bellied snakes, and even snakes with rudimentary legs, snakes with rattles on their tails, and with vicious-looking forked tongues, darting ever and anon from their mouths, snakes with eyes gleaming like infernal gems, and snakes with no eyes at all, snakes with things like wings, snakes that had appendages which resembled fins, and snakes with manes on their heads and necks like horses.

Big snakes and little snakes; snakes of all shapes and sizes. Little snakes, ten inches long; big snakes, twenty feet. Whip snakes, thin as a piece of wire, full of energy and activity, ever wriggling and twisting their frail bodies; fat and heavy snakes, blind as the slow-worm, but with death-dealing fangs; deaf adders, small and insignificant-looking, but on whose bite follows an hour's agony and fatal collapse.

There they were, some three score of them, crawling about the arena, winding, twisting, doubling, until it seemed the whole ground was in motion, some making that hissing noise pe-

cular to snakes, which, once heard, is never forgotten.

The big snakes, opening and shutting their jaws with a snap-like noise; the rattlesnakes, rattling their rattles; and all the snakes together causing a murmuring, rustling sort of sound, as they wriggled their lithe bodies along.

Andrew Battel, who, from his English experiences, had seen very little of snakes, did not like this at all.

'Peter, my boy,' he said to his tall friend, 'I don't like this at all. I paid three dollars to come into this here place; I'm right down ready and willing to pay six to get out.'

'Wall,' replied Peter, 'can't say as I quite like them creeping critters, but guess they ain't spiteful, or they wouldn't let 'em out.'

Ya Roni Sarka now spoke.

'Senors,' said he, 'have no fear; I know these creatures all. They are my children—my slaves.'

Andrew Battel looked astonished, but Peter Carder said,

'Well, then, mister, just tell them not to bite.'

'I will tell them I am here, and that will be sufficient,' said the Peruvian.

Andrew Battel looked at him suspiciously, and formed this sentence in his mind:

'This chap is an impostor, after all.'

Ya Roni Sarka saw the look, and, it seemed, even read the unspoken thought.

'Senor, what I say is true. The mystery of snake-charming I learnt years ago in sunny South America. If I will it, those crawling reptiles shall cling to and fondle me—ay, cover me with their

slimy caresses, as do the myriads of the hive the queen bee.'

Peter Carder now framed a thought in his mind.

'Guess our one-eyed friend and the mountebank might start a match and run for being the two biggest liars in the world.'

Ya Roni Sarka, again appearing to divine his thoughts, turned to him and said,

'Senor Carder, I will give you proof of the truth of my words.'

He then calmly walked half across the circular arena, and placed himself with his back against the centre pole, and then commenced making a sort of sibilating sound, half hiss, half whistle.

Instantly there was a sudden commotion amongst the serpentine tribe; then perfect stillness, quite as sudden. A moment before the ground was all alive with dozens of wriggling creatures, and now they lay still and straight on the brown ground.

A murmur of applause went up from the audience, who believed that our friend the Peruvian was the showman.

Ya Roni Sarka, after the interval of a minute or so, again whistled, but in another key, and behold, there was suddenly life in all these inanimate snakes.

The rattlesnakes rattled their rattles, the hissing-snakes hissed, the big snakes snapped their jaws, and one snake—a rare snake, called the dog-snake—uttered a cry resembling a sharp canine bark.

They all now commenced crawling towards our friend, the Inca of Peru, and when within a

few feet formed themselves in semi-circular order. He then began murmuring or humming a monotonous, wordless refrain.

This had a marvellous effect on the snakes. Big snakes and little snakes, thick snakes and thin snakes, handsome snakes and hideous snakes, blue snakes and brown snakes, chequered snakes, pepper-and-salt coloured snakes, white-bellied snakes and yellow-bellied snakes, snakes with rattles on their tails, snakes with fins on their backs, snakes with fins on their bellies, snakes with little legs, and snakes with horns on their heads, hissing snakes, whistling snakes, and snakes that barked like dogs; snakes of all sorts and descriptions reared themselves on their tails, wagged their heads, and kept time to the music.

A thunder of applause broke out from the astonished and delighted audience, and a moment or two afterwards there entered from the back of the booth Samson Von Burr, the Copper Dutchman, the proprietor, probably more astonished than any one else at the extraordinary scene which awaited him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PETER CARDER TRIES A FALL WITH THE COPPER DUTCHMAN.

‘DONNER und blitzen ! What’s all this ?’ cried the Copper Dutchman, as, throwing open the wicket, he passed into the arena.

Peter Carder instantly divined that this was the proprietor of the booth—the vaunted Copper

Dutchman himself, and proceeded to take a good look at his future antagonist.

He saw a broad-shouldered, burly, strongly-built man of about five feet ten inches, clad from foot to head in untanned leather, boots and hat, even, being of the same material.

His complexion was a dark, copperish brown, and, to Peter Carder's amazement and bewilderment, there was perfectly apparent a distinct metallic lustre on the skin.

Peter Carder whispered to Andrew Battel, who was beside him,

'What do you think of him, Andrew? Of course it's all bunkum; but may I be hanged if he don't look like copper!'

Now, the person alluded to happened to catch something of these words.

'Yes, sirree,' he said, turning sharply on the Yankee; 'and here you see me, Samson Von Burr, the best man, and the strongest man, and the heaviest man in the world; and what's that one-eyed little 'coon's game with my snakes?'

The One-eyed Snake answered for himself.

'Senor Copper Dutchman,' he said quietly, 'I am giving these creeping creatures a lesson in music and dancing, and my friend, Mr. Peter Carder, is going to give you a lesson in the manly art of wrestling.'

'That's a fact!' cried Peter corroboratively. 'I'm on for a fall for anything, from ten dollars to a thousand.'

'I'll take you for a thousand, that's my last takings, now and here!' cried the Copper Dutchman excitedly. 'Guess I'm ready to stake the money; are you?'

‘All ready,’ replied Peter Carder slowly, and deliberately opening a pocket-book, from which he produced the requisite amount in Bank of New York notes. The Copper Dutchman promptly did likewise, and said,

‘Who shall be the stakeholder?’

Ya Roni Sarka replied at once, although the question was not addressed to him.

‘The snakes—let the snakes guard the money until the issue is decided.’

The Peruvian held out his hand, and took the notes from Peter Carder.

After a moment's hesitation the Copper Dutchman did likewise, whereupon this mysterious being who, it now appeared, had snake-charming amongst his other accomplishments, placed the two rolls of notes close to the upright pole in the centre of the circus.

At a slight sound from him, all the snakes now clustered together here, forming a pyramid several feet high around the base of the pole, and completely covering the notes there deposited.

There was now great excitement amongst the audience, who had witnessed these strange snake manœuvres with the greatest wonder and delight. When it became generally known that there was a match to come off, a real *bonâ-fide* trial of strength and skill for a wager of five hundred dollars a side, the enthusiasm and excitement swelled to a furious pitch. The Copper Dutchman had been travelling about that part of the State for several weeks. He was now well known, and, not altogether without reason, was looked upon as a prodigy of strength.

For it was a certain fact that he had easily

overthrown all who had attempted to contend with him in wrestling or feats of strength.

The Copper Dutchman was by this time almost an institution with them, and great interest was manifested in his success. On the other hand, Peter Carder, coming from the neighbourhood, was well known to many, and his gigantic stature and strength, with the renown of past combats and victories, caused him to be almost as good a favourite as the Copper Dutchman.

The latter now proceeded to divest himself of his tunic of untanned leather, and presently stood in the arena, the upper part of his body encased in a close-fitting shirt of silk and merino.

This displayed his wonderful muscular development to the best advantage, and a murmur of admiration arose from the delighted audience.

Peter Carder, as he slowly divested himself of his upper garments, regarded his opponent with a critical eye, and, in good truth, was a good deal astonished—not to say taken aback—at the sight of the herculean proportions and massive muscles of the extraordinary specimen of humanity before him. However, he knew his own strength, and the immense advantage in the way of leverage which his great height gave him, and did not doubt of being able to secure the victory.

Both being now in readiness, Peter Carder stepped forward and confronted the Copper Dutchman. His tall, stalwart form towered above the shorter one, as might some tough and hardy sapling rear its head above the stump of a big tree stubbornly rooted in the ground.

As the antagonists after shaking hands prepared to grapple, there were loud shouts of encouragement and advice on all sides.

‘Bully for Peter Carder, the down-east corn-stalk!’

‘Hurrah for Samson Von Burr!’

‘Bully for the Copper Dutchman!’

These and many other cries rang out, and showed the deep interest which the affair excited.

The circus was now crammed full, the news of the approaching struggle having flown over the township. Suddenly a loud roar seemed to break simultaneously from the myriad throats, announcing the fact that the contest had commenced.

It would be almost impossible to describe in detail the incidents and episodes of the eventful struggle. Each had obtained a good grip, the advantage, if any, being in favour of Peter Carder; but, though he exerted all his strength, he was unable to force his antagonist one inch from his standpoint.

The Copper Dutchman stood like a solid statue rooted to its pedestal; his feet never shifting from the position he had taken up for them, though the upper portion of his body swayed and rocked to an angle of forty-five degrees under the prodigious efforts of Peter Carder to force him either sideways or backwards.

The stalwart and redoubtable Dutchman, during the earlier part of the struggle, contented himself with a stubborn, stolid, and successful resistance to the attempts of his adversary.

Ere long the tremendous exertions of Peter Carder began to tell a tale even upon his hard and sinewy frame. Perspiration freely ran from his neck and arms, his skin was flushed fiery red, whilst his eyes were bloodshot and unusually bright.

Samson Von Burr, still standing firm and immovable as a rock, now felt confident the victory would be his. A few more fierce attempts on the part of Peter Carder, one of which was, indeed, nearly successful, by reason of the desperate force and vigour thrown into it, and his energies sensibly relaxed.

Still, however, the struggle was not over, for the Dutchman, in turn, when he made the attempt, was unable to overthrow his powerful antagonist.

Each moment, however, the desperate exertions of Peter Carder told more and more upon his physical strength and powers of endurance.

For the first time Samson Von Burr shifted his foothold, throwing his right leg behind his opponent; then suddenly moving his right hand from the right shoulder of the Yankee, he obtained a most formidable grip; throwing all his strength into this supreme effort, he, inch by inch, forced back that tall body of his antagonist.

There were a few moments of suspense, and then a shout, which rang out loud and clear all over the town, proclaimed the fact that Samson Von Burr had gained the victory.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BLACK CHOCKTANOS.

PETER CARDER, fairly defeated in the struggle, had sense enough to acknowledge the fact to himself: and, moreover, magnanimity enough to feel no ill-will towards his conqueror.

On the contrary, he offered his hand when parting, and, covered with sawdust and tan, after his fall, he rose from the ground.

'Mister Copper Dutchman,' he said, 'you beat me fair, and I'm not the man to grumble. As for the "ten and a quarter" business, that's all "buncombe," sartin sure! But you are a stout man, and no mistake! Bet your life you're the first man hev given me a fall this five years. Yes, sirree, you've earned the five hundred dollars, and I don't grudge 'em you. Maybe, Don Ramon,' he added, turning to the Peruvian, 'you'll ask your reptile friends to give up the stakes?'

'Certainly, senor,' replied Ya Roni Sarka; and then, giving vent to a shrill whistle, the snakes instantly commenced uncoiling and separating, and presently gliding away, scattering all over the arena, the thousand dollars, lying at the foot of the centre pole, was displayed to view.

The last of the Incas picked up the stakes, and with grave politeness handed them to the Copper Dutchman.

'Senor, it was fairly won—it was well won! You are a wonderful man!'

'*Donner und Blitzen!* and you are a wonderful man! Just say now how you can talk to my snakes, and make them do as you like. I thought I was pretty good with them, but I hav'n't a chance with you that way, nohow you fix it.'

'Senor, the snakes are all South American snakes, and I come from South America. I know every kind—big ones and little ones—harmless, poisonous, and deadly poisonous. I perceive you have many there, a bite from which is certain death.'

‘Yes, sirree,’ replied the proprietor of the booth, who, speaking with scarce any Dutch accent, had picked up perfectly the American idioms and phrases; ‘yes, sirree, guess I was real right down proud o’ my snakes. I reckoned I could make ’em do anything a’most a man could, for, you see, I learned the ways of the critters when I was down in the mines in New Granada and Ecuador.’

‘Ah! you hav’n’t been as far south as Peru, Bolivia, or the Rio Negro country?’

‘Yes, sirree. I was one of a party that went on a “rush” expedition, right down into Bolivia. There was a gold quarry found, so went the rumour—not a gold mine where you get it in bits, and work hard for it as you have to do in Australia and California, but a quarry where you quarry it out as you would stone.’

‘You didn’t find this here place, I suppose?’ inquired Peter Carder.

‘No, mister; we travelled about more than a year, and went over a good many hundreds o’ miles. We saw many wonderful things; we got many wonderful things, these hyar snakes among ’em. We learned many wonderful things. I picked up the knowledge of dealing with snakes, and all things that creep on their bellies. I thought there wasn’t such a clever snake man in the United States as Samson Von Burr, till I came across you, mister, and I will own that you ken give me a start and win easy.’

‘Ah!’ replied Don Ramon quietly, ‘I suppose you fell in with the Paragana Indians? They know something of snake charming, but the Black Chocktanos is the only tribe that has the art to perfection. I have known this tribe summon

around them all the snakes of the districts they pass through, and, by their charms, compel them to follow, and to keep abreast and ahead of them. Marching on through the forest more snakes fell into the ever-increasing crowd, until they could only be numbered by millions.'

'Well, all I've got to say,' remarked Andrew Battel, 'is this. They must have been particularly fond of snakes to take them about with them that way.'

'It was not a matter of like or dislike, senor, for the Black Chocktanos were quite indifferent to snakes, one way or the other; but you must know they were a most warlike, predatory, and rapacious tribe, second only in all South America to the terrible Rappahoes, with whom I was for so long. When you think, you will perceive the advantage it was to them to be thus surrounded as it were by a belt of snakes, most of them venomous—many of them deadly in their bites. After surprising and plundering prosperous villages—selecting a time when all the fighting men were away—they would be able to escape through the forest wilds, with much less danger of being followed, and attacked by superior numbers.'

'Mister, I can see by your talk that you've been down about those parts.'

'I was born in South America, bred in South America, passed the greater part of my life in South America, senor. To return your words, I can perceive that you also have seen much of South America. You spoke of wonderful things you had learned there.'

'Ay, mister, wonderful indeed, if they was only true. We have come across some men quite

out of the common way. I expect you won't believe it when I tell you any more than that I'm a ton and a quarter weight; but these Indians—there were only a few of them—were big men, tall men. You're about the tallest man I've seen this side o' the equator, Mister Carder; but these was downright giants, and no mistake.'

'How high, and what was their colour?' asked the Peruvian eagerly.

'Well, mister, you'll think I'm lying, but I ain't. There wasn't one of 'em eight foot and a half, and the biggest were over nine feet high, ay, maybe ten. There's no mistake about it. You couldn't reach up to their eyes standing on tiptoe and stretching your arms to the utmost. And as to their colours—they were not black, nor dark, nor red, nor tawny, but a sort of an olive brown. And what I tell you is a fact, mister—'

'Senor, I believe you. What you have said about the snake-charming Indians is true; what you have said about these giants is true. Those whom you met—had they any marks on their foreheads?'

'Yes, mister, each one had a white mark like a little sugar loaf, the bottom of it between the eyebrows, the top running up to the beginning of the hair.'

'The isosceles triangle of the symbol of the gigantic guardians of the Iron Gate. Senor, I must have further talk with you.'

The one eye of the last of the Incas gleamed with unwonted fire, and it was obvious that he was much excited by what he had heard from the Copper Dutchman.

During the time this conversation had been

going on, a sleight-of-hand man, with balls and cup-hoops, and various conjuring tricks, had been ostensibly amusing the audience.

However, the latter, excited by the late wrestling contest, and seeming to care little for the mountebank, loudly demanded something more inspiring.

There were shouts and calls for another wrestling match.

Peter Carder declared he would not wrestle again.

Andrew Battle, of course, would have had no chance with the conqueror of the gigantic Yankee, and it seemed that the wishes of the great crowd now assembled could not be gratified.

But then spoke Don Ramon, the One-eyed Snake :

‘Senor,’ he said to the Copper Dutchman, ‘I have an interest in you. You and I have something in common. I will, if you please, amuse your audience now with some snake-play. Then you shall come with us. You shall tell us all you know, all you heard from the giants you met in South America. And in the evening, to amuse your customers, I will myself wrestle you for 500 dollars, the snakes, as before, being stakeholders and witnesses.’

At this there arose a loud roar of applause from the spectators.

The Copper Dutchman agreed to the terms, and Ya Roni Sarka at once prepared for his snake entertainment.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SNAKE'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE COPPER
DUTCHMAN.

‘GENTLEMEN,’ said the proprietor of the booth, a new idea apparently having taken possession of him, ‘I should like to have a little talk with you before the snake performance, and then we’ll settle more certainly about this wrestling match. It seems to me it would be wiser to give the snakes a rest, and have a grand special performance in the evening to conclude with the snakes, our wrestling-match last of all.

Our three friends had no objection to offer, so accordingly the Copper Dutchman made proclamation to his audience, to the effect that the show would now go on as usual, but in the evening there would be a grand special performance, concluding with a display of the marvellous powers of the new and most wonderful snake charmer, lately arrived in the town. The performance would conclude with a wrestling combat between himself—hitherto undefeated, and champion of the world—and the said snake charmer, who had challenged him to the contest, for the sum of five hundred dollars.

In the course of the evening, placards, containing full announcements of the prices for this special performance, the conditions of the match, and all other particulars would be sent round the township.

The Copper Dutchman then ordered into the arena others of his company, who proceeded to

amuse the audience, whilst he himself, and our three friends, retired behind the canvas screen.

It was a queer sort of a crib into which the proprietor introduced them—something like the green-room of a small country theatre; also a wardrobe, store-room for theatrical properties, with which, and other effects of all sorts and descriptions, it was encumbered.

There was neither chair nor table, but barrels, and sundry boxes and cases, did duty for both. A brief glimpse and a private performance, or rather rehearsal, was afforded to our friends when they entered.

A young and pretty woman—quite a girl, and very neatly and picturesquely attired as a Spanish dancer—was dancing, or rather, perhaps, I should say practising, steps on two empty wooden cases placed close together.

For a short time she did not perceive that anyone had entered, for her face was more than half turned away, and the noise and uproar of the circus was sufficient to drown all but loud sounds.

The Copper Dutchman stopped suddenly, and holding up his hand regarded the pretty dancer attentively and affectionately, and with evident satisfaction.

She was dancing to the sound of the smallest possible little tambourine, whose gentle drumming and tinkling could scarcely be heard.

Her small feet, encased in white satin shoes, moved gracefully, rapidly, and with perfect ease, as she executed the difficult steps she was practising. All our three adventurers were struck more or less with admiration of the beautiful and graceful young creature before them.

Her complexion was a rich clear olive; her hair, very luxuriant and simply bound round her head in plaits, was black as ravens' wings; her eyes, though not absolutely black, appeared to be so, and were large, liquid, and melting in expression.

Her face was a perfect oval; features finely cut and faultless, and her half-open lips gave a glimpse of small, regular teeth, white as ivory.

About the middle height, her slender and graceful figure was displayed to the best advantage by the close-fitting velvet bodice she wore. The trimmings of this were of deep orange colour, as was the muslin skirt she wore. In her glossy black tresses she wore, as ornaments, two white flowers, and in her delicate little ears there hung, by gold wires, small pink-coloured sea-shells. When, happening to turn her face, she saw she was observed, she started like a frightened fawn, and made as if to run away; but the Copper Dutchman said a few words in Spanish, or rather a *patois* of the Portuguese, Spanish, and Indian tongues spoken in South America, and she immediately stopped and came up to him, blushing and looking a little confused, but smiling, and withal very charming.

Andrew Battel was especially struck by the beauty and grace of this young creature, and seemed quite unable to take his eyes from her face.

Presently she caught his fixed gaze, and herself blushing, he dropped his eyes in the greatest confusion, feeling very much abashed and ashamed.

'Why, Nina,' said Samson Von Burr, 'you are indeed industrious. You have not to dance any more to-day, for you know I don't allow you

to appear at night when the audience is more rowdy and noisy.'

'Ah! father,' replied the young girl, in tones of dulcet softness, 'I want to be perfect.'

'Well, you're a very good little girl. Run away now, for I and these gentlemen have some business together. Stay a moment though, Nina; bring a flask of my Schiedam, and some glasses, there's a pet.'

Nina vanished, and Peter Carder remarked to Samson Von Burr,

'Your daughter, mister, I reckon?'

'No, only my daughter by adoption. During my travels away South, we came across this girl, then but an infant—alone, deserted in the forest. There is a strange romance, a mystery about her, which will probably never be solved.

'She was found under a giant cocoa-palm tree, in a basket-work cradle, wrapped in fine soft linen, and was lying on the leaves of roses and other flowers, indeed almost smothered by them.

'We camped there, and remained for thirty hours, thinking that some one would surely come to reclaim the child, which was of rare beauty.

'But it was not, and I, after much trouble, partly by bribes, partly by threats, persuaded one of the Indian women to rear this forest foundling.

'That is now between fourteen and fifteen years ago, during which time I have never regretted the day when I found and took under my care Nina Rosa, as I called her, my forest flower.

'I love her now as my own daughter. It is for her sake I toil and slave at this mountebank drudgery; for her sake that I consent to make a show of myself to vulgar crowds; for her sake I

shall accumulate a great fortune, for it is my wish that she should be rich and magnificent, as her beauty, her grace, and her goodness deserve.

‘For her own sake, and not for personal gain, I have caused her to be taught dancing, singing, and other accomplishments worth money. That girl, gentlemen, has been offered three hundred dollars a month at a New York theatre.

‘But I do not wish her to work for hire unless there come necessity—unless she were to lose me, or poverty overtake me, which, thank heaven! at present does not seem probable, for I am making money fast.’

The Copper Dutchman was evidently inclined to be communicative; but the subject of the conversation entering at the moment, he, of course, ceased.

Gracefully, and with smiling ease, she placed the flask of Schiedam on the head of an empty cask. Then she quickly placed around this impromptu table two or three light deal cases and a hamper; and, with a charming smile and wave of the hand, motioned to her adopted father’s guests to seat themselves.

An empress, inviting her noble company to a splendid banquet, could not have done it with more perfect dignity and grace.

A smile showed on the somewhat stern, stolid features of the Copper Dutchman.

‘Good child, good child! Now run away and play with your goat, if you choose. Stay, though; where is your jewel? I should like these gentlemen to see it.’

Nina Rosa bounded away, and speedily returned, wearing now around her slender neck a

thin gold chain, to which was attached a brilliant green stone. She unclasped it and handed it to her father, for so we will call him.

He, in turn, showed it to our friends.

‘An emerald of the finest quality; it is of great value. It was found with her in the forest, and I have taken care she has retained it ever since.’

Neither Peter Carder nor Andrew Battel knew anything about precious stones, but with the One-eyed Snake it was very different.

‘A most magnificent jewel, indeed,’ he said, after examining it very carefully. ‘It must be worth at least five thousand dollars.’

‘More than that, mister—more than that. If the worst ever comes to the worst it will be a tidy little fortune for Nina here. But she shall never want it—never want it. She will wear it, and other jewels of great value. Who knows that some day a queen’s coronet may not rest on her head?’

It was evident that this extraordinary man was enthusiastic to the verge of folly on the subject of Nina Rosa, though in good truth there was excuse for the extravagant panegyric and prophecies of future greatness he lavished on her.

After all had looked at the jewel, Samson Von Burr gave it back to her, and, with a smile and graceful curtesy, she retired.

It was evident now to all our friends that the Copper Dutchman was an extraordinary man, and had passed through some wondrous adventures. Extraordinary he certainly was in appearance; extraordinary in his enormous strength, and still more extraordinary it seemed in his history.

The One-eyed Snake, especially, was deeply

interested in him, knowing that he had travelled in South America; and any being who had wandered near the home of his forefathers was an object of intense interest to him.

As the time for the evening exhibition of snakes and trial of strength approached, an immense crowd besieged the booth, fighting, roaring, screaming, and yelling, until the place was filled in every part, and those who were unable to obtain admission kept up a fearful uproar, drowning everything but their own voices.

When all was ready, and the impatience of the audience announced in no measured tones, the Snake and Samson Von Burr entered the ring, followed by Peter Carder and Andrew Batte'.

The Copper Dutchman was received with immense cheering, but the Snake's slight form excited the risibility of the audience, and a plentiful shower of advice, to the effect that he had better 'skedaddle before he was made into pumpkin squash,' was poured down upon him.

But he stood unmoved, gazing upon the surging mass of heads with supreme indifference.

Without any preliminary posturing, the two combatants faced each other, the Snake entwining his arms round the body of the Copper Dutchman like two insidious snakes.

Samson Von Burr undoubtedly anticipated an easy victory; but he, in common with many other great men, reckoned without his host—for the Last of the Incas, by a dexterous movement, suddenly back-heeled the bronze Dutchman, and cast his burly form upon the sawdust.

The movement was so quick that the audience as well as Samson were completely confounded,

many of the former inclining to the opinion that it was a 'barney,' or pre-arranged affair, and venting their anger in words and oaths of a powerful nature.

But when the Snake deliberately stooped over his prostrate foe and raised him, not only to his feet but high in the air, the tent rung with plaudits, and, standing erect, the audience cheered themselves hoarse with enthusiasm.

The Dutchman accepted his defeat like a truly great man; shook hands with his opponent and bowed calmly to the audience, although he was inwardly troubled, and seriously wondered if he had met with a mortal being.

The Snake appeared to think but little of his victory, not even bowing in response to the shoutings of the excited, heated spectators, but simply proceeding with the programme by performing with the serpents.

If he had previously astounded his friends and the public, he fairly bewildered them now; for the repiles seemed to obey his every beck and call, writhed on the ground, entwined round his limbs, encircled his throat, and although they might a hundred times have crushed out of his body every spark of life, not one assailed him or did more than he directed by his marvellous power.

The entertainment over, the people spread over the town, bearing the intelligence of the mysterious power of the One-eyed Snake to every nook and corner; while the defeated and still wondering Dutchman retired with his new-found friends to the private portion of the establishment.

They then held a long conversation, and the

outline of the story of Don Ramon was told, Samson Von Burr listening keenly.

‘I’m downright taken with this hyar yarn,’ he said when it was concluded, ‘and I’ll make one for a sarch for this same Idol’s Eye if you’ll have me. I’m tired of this mountebank business; it makes the dollars, but ’tain’t worthy of a man o’ my figure; I’m made for something better. Nina Rosa I can fix with some friends of mine for a time. Is it a bargain? Do I go?’

The Snake, Andrew Battel, and Peter Carder looked at each other for a few moments; and then the latter, rising, stretched out his long arm towards the Dutchman, and exclaimed,

‘By thunder! you’re in. Give us your paw. You’ve jined the men as will make more dollars than any ship in this all-powerful country can carry!’

The others cordially assented; and thus the bond was ratified, and four as strong men, and true as ever assembled, were banded together in a race for wealth.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NINA ROSA.

THE thoughts of Andrew Battel were entirely occupied by the charming dark-eyed dancer.

Though not present, the soft musical tones of her voice still rang in his ears, and his active fancy conjured up her image vividly enough.

‘Now, my friends,’ said Samson Von Burr, as he uncorked a queer-shaped flask of Schiedam—

'for, somehow or other, I feel as though we were old friends—you shall now taste a drop of schnapps such as would have made Rip Van Winkle's mouth water. I take it straight, but perhaps some of you would like it with a little water.'

So saying, he half-filled the four glasses, and set the example by drinking off his own at a gulp.

Peter Carder followed suit, actuated by a desire not to be outdone in this respect by his wrestling conqueror.

The strong spirit almost took his breath away.

'Jerusalem!' he cried, after a gasp, 'you must have a copper-tinned stomach to swallow that stuff "straight" anyhow—darned if it ain't took all the skin off my throat! Be careful, boys! I know you ain't neither of you made o' metal, nor a ton and a quarter weight.'

Andrew Battel smiled, and filled his glass with water, as did the One-eyed Snake, but gravely.

'Senor,' said the latter, 'the liquor is excellent. You have spoken of South America, of Peru, of wines, and precious stones, perhaps you will favour us with some account of your life and adventures, which, I feel positively sure, have been wonderful and extraordinary.'

'Right you are there, my boy,' replied Samson Von Burr, filling himself another glass. 'Guess I could astonish a few old women of the Shaker sect, if I was to relate all I had seen, heard, and heard tell of. But it's a longish story. Tell you what I propose. I'll just do as some of the writing 'coons do with their stories—divide it into two parts. Guess I can get through the first before the circus is over; then I'll come round to where you're stopping, and give you the second part of it—the

most wonderful part, too, all about being half copper and over a ton weight. Now, gentlemen, just you make yourselves comfortable. Here's a box of cheroots come straight from Manilla, and paid no duty, bet your life; and if you prefer hot grog why Nina will make a brew for you in a quarter less no time.'

Now, as a fact, neither of our friends was in the habit of drinking hot grog in the daytime; indeed, of drinking grog at all, except, perhaps, a couple of glasses over the evening pipe.

Peter Carder and Ya Roni Sarka at once declared that they were perfectly satisfied with the schnapps and cold water.

But Andrew Battel, to their astonishment, said he felt chilly, and would like a little hot grog to warm him.

Yet it was rather a warm afternoon, and, moreover, there was an iron stove in the place, which raised the temperature considerably.

Artful Andrew Battel!

He wished for another view in the flesh of the lovely vision still floating before his eyes in imagination.

The words of the Copper Dutchman about Nina brewing the grog at once decided him to have his schnapps hot.

'No trouble at all about it, mister,' said Samson Von Burr, and with the words producing a little silver whistle, he blew it.

In a few seconds Nina Rosa came bounding in, pushing aside a double curtain as she did so, through the opening in which Andrew was able to catch a glimpse of an inner room, led up to by a canvas passage.

'Here am I, father,' the damsel said, as she stood before them with her hands demurely crossed, as might become an eastern slave waiting on the Sultan, yet with laughing eyes and bright smile, which had little of the slave in them.

Again the Copper Dutchman's stolid, somewhat saturnine features relaxed, and there came on his face a genial tender expression.

'What's the meaning of all this, Nina? You know you have neither to dance nor sing to-night, and yet you are in your new Turkish dress.'

'That's just it, father,' replied Nina saucily. 'It's because it's new I put it on, to see if I should like it. O, it's beautiful, really beautiful!'

'Yes, yes, Nina; but I did not whistle for you to look at your new dress. I want you to make some hot grog for this gentleman,' indicating Andrew Battel, 'who will doubtless prefer it to either you or your Turkish finery.'

Nina looked pettish and cross for a moment.

Andrew Battel, however, proceeded to deny vehemently that it was as Samson Von Burr stated, which seemed to restore the young lady to good humour.

'I don't believe a word of what you say,' she said laughingly, 'you crusty old copper saucepan! I will make the gentleman the very nicest glass of grog I can. And I'm sure the dress is very pretty, isn't it, sir?' she added, appealing, with true womanish coquetry, to Andrew Battel.

There could be little doubt as to what would be his answer.

But, although he was enthusiastic in his praise, he had good reason so to be.

For, assuredly, from out the great globe round,

it would have been hard to select a lovelier damsel, in a more picturesque and pretty costume, than Nina Rosa, Foundling of the Forest.

A light golden diadem, with silver stars, contrasted well with her raven black hair.

A white cashmere jacket, embroidered with gold, confined round the waist with a golden girdle, clothed her bust and body.

Then there came a skirt of dark orange hue falling to the knees. A pair of white gauze trousers, fastened just above the ankles, and orange-coloured shoes, with black sandals, completed the Turkish attire of Nina Rosa. She kept her word with Andrew Battel, and deftly brewed him such a glass of hot grog as he had never tasted before.

It was sweetened just sufficiently, with a dash of lemon acid, and the flavour of the peel, and essence of almond.

He quaffed it, and pronounced it delicious; and yet, when she, with a smile and a curtsy, withdrew, it seemed to him insipid.

‘Now, noble friends,’ said Samson Von Burr, who was warming rapidly under the influence of the ‘schnapps,’ ‘make yourselves comfortable. We’ve got a clear hour and a quarter still, before my intelligent audience will have finished admiring and applauding my acrobats, tumblers, conjurors, and the varied wonders to be seen only in the monstre and not-to-be-equalled circus of Samson Von Burr. Draw up together. Fill your glasses; and you, mister,’ to Andrew Battel, ‘when you want another glass of grog just let me know. One little whistle, and, like the magicians of old, it shall be served you by a fairy.’

‘A fairy, indeed,’ thought Andrew Battel; but

though he felt very much inclined to swallow down his hot grog instantly, thought it would be hardly prudent, and so refrained.

'Well, now, senor, touching your history,' said the One-eyed Snake. 'You were going to give it us in two parts. Suppose you begin.'

'You seem most mightily interested,' remarked the Copper Dutchman, in a tone which seemed in the faintest degree suspicious.

'I am deeply interested, senor,' replied the One-eyed Snake warmly. 'I was born in South America, lived the greater part of my life in South America. I know from what you have said that you have had remarkable experiences and adventures in South America; so have I, and perhaps yours may tally with mine, and each corroborate the other.'

'Well, well, mister, just to please you I'll spin my little yarn—at least, the first part of it. I don't doubt you can beat me in that way; but I'm bound to win when it comes to wrestling. So here goes. First of all, however, fill up your glasses. We will be as jolly as my great-great grandfather; and who do you think he was, gentlemen?'

'Not the least idea,' replied Peter Carder.

"Mynheer Van Dunk,
Who never got drunk, &c."

of course—ha, ha, ha! Well, now, to begin the first part of my story. But I see your glass is getting low, mister,' turning to Andrew Battel. 'We must have our little Turkish fairy in again, I can find. And, moreover—*donner und blitzen!*—we shall want another flask of Schiedam!'

Andrew, nothing loth, made no objection ; and again the silver whistle was heard.

Promptly as before came bounding in the lovely Nina, smiling, graceful and willing as before.

She brewed Andrew Battel another glass of grog, and then bestowing on him a bewitching look, vanished with the same charming smile and curtsy as before.

The Copper Dutchman commenced his narrative.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE COPPER DUTCHMAN'S STORY.

‘I HAVE told you before that I am descended lineally from Mynheer Van Dunk. I may add that there is also a cross of the Rip Van Winkle strain running through my blood.

‘In sporting phraseology, in fact, I believe I may be described thus—

‘SAMSON VON BURR;

‘SIRE : Mynheer Van Dunk;

‘DAM : Rip Van Winkle.

‘Perhaps the Rip Van Winkle blood may be the cause of my being the subject of such extraordinary variations from the course of Nature.’

‘What’s the partickler variations, mister?’ asked Peter Carder, ever curious, and waiting his chance for asking a question.

‘Well, as I told you before, mister,’ replied the Copper Dutchman, as he quietly filled his glass

from the Schiedam flask, 'I'm a ton an' a quarter weight.'

'Ya—a—s,' replied the Yankee doubtfully.

'Wall, anyhow, mister,' said Samson good-humouredly, 'I was a few pounds too heavy for you to move.'

Andrew laughed at this retort, and even the One-eyed Snake smiled.

'I was born of an old Dutch family, settled in the State of Pennsylvania. It happened there was another branch of our family settled on the west coast of South America, at the town of Lima in Peru.

'As no one knows better than you,' continued the Copper Dutchman, particularly addressing Don Ramon, 'the mountain ranges of Peru are rich in mineral wealth, gold and silver, and copper ore in abundance.

'Now, my kinsfolk—steady-going, hard-headed Dutchmen—were not dazzled with the thoughts of the gold, silver, and precious stones to be obtained by those whom fickle Fortune might choose to favour.

'Well, they knew that, though a few lucky ones suddenly found themselves possessors of great wealth, yet that far the greater multitude of gold and silver seekers led lives of hardship and toil, rewarded by little more than a livelihood.

'Now, they had different views with respect to copper. The working of a copper mine, it is true, was of a more serious and difficult nature, requiring both a considerable number of men, mechanical appliances, and machinery; and this, again, would necessitate capital, money in hand.

'My relations—thrifty, prudent Dutchmen as

they were—had saved a little money, sufficient to start on a small scale.

‘Plodding steadily on, they prospered in a moderate degree; that is to say, they were able to live comfortably, pay their labourers, and their way generally, and annually put by a small sum.

‘But there came a year of trouble and desolation. The whole country, far and wide, was smitten by the terrible cholera plague. Amongst the myriads swept away were my kinsmen. Men, women, and children all perished alike. At the copper mines it was especially virulent. None, save a few half-bred Indians, escaping with their lives.

‘Thieves and murderers took advantage of the general panic and dismay, and ruin and robbery stalked through the already desolated land.

‘The banks were plundered, and all the other moveable property of my dead relations seized. However, there remained the copper mine, buildings, and machinery. My father, as next-of-kin, was sole heir. Though making a comfortable living in Philadelphia, my father was not as prosperous as he could wish.

‘He decided, therefore, on trying his fortunes in the southern continent, and in a different line of life. Accordingly, he sold his little farm and all belonging, and took passage for himself and family for Peru, where, after a desperate passage round the Horn, we safely arrived.

‘And thus it was that I, the eldest son of my father, made my appearance in that far-away land.’

The One-eyed Snake here interrupted.

‘Pardon, senor, I have a question to ask. My-

self, having passed a great part of my life in South America, in Peru, and adjoining countries, am aware of the history of the land, from time beyond chronicles to the present date.

‘There has never been but one such terrible visitation as that of which you speak, and that was long, long ago, long before my time, ay, and long before your time, too, Senor Von Burr.’

‘Not before my time,’ replied the Copper Dutchman gravely. ‘I was seven years old at the time the news came, and had intelligence enough to understand its terrible import.’

Ya Roni Sarka gazed at him fixedly, and it seemed as though he meant to pierce him through and through, with that one brilliant gleaming eye.

‘Senor,’ he said quietly, ‘at what date do you fix this pestilence?’

The Copper Dutchman seemed to be thinking back for a few moments, and then replied with the utmost coolness and composure,

‘It was just a hundred and twenty-three years ago.’

Andrew Battel gazed at him with open mouth and staring eyes. Strange to say, the One-eyed Snake betrayed no particular excitement at this astounding statement, but looked at the Copper Dutchman steadily, silently, for a short space.

Peter Carder slowly raised his giant form to its full height.

‘Mr. Von Burr,’ he said, bringing his great paw down upon the Dutchman’s shoulder, ‘you air a strong man, I know; also you may be, what you say, the strongest man in the world—that I don’t know. You may weigh a ton and a half, and be the heaviest man in the world, as you say

you are. But this I do know, and I'll bet on it—may I be rammed, slammed, jammed, banged, and hanged if you ain't the biggest liar on this universal earth. A hundred and thirty years old!

At this moment the loud booming of a gong announced the conclusion of the performance, and it was necessary for the Copper Dutchman to see to the clearing of the circus.

Accordingly our friends departed, it having been arranged that the Copper Dutchman should come to their hostelry after the evening performance, and there finish his wonderful account of himself—his history and adventures.

As they walked down the street together, Peter Carder remarked,

'I say, Andrew, that's a teller, ain't it?—that last remark of the Copper Dutchman. As to his being a ton and a half weight, and the strongest man in the world, them was pretty stiffers; but this here last, it air a peculiar animal in the way of thunderers—guess it's a ten-headed alligator and a dragon-tailed buffalo, all rolled into one! What do you think of it—ay, old hoss?'

'Well,' replied Andrew gravely; 'I don't wish to judge anybody harshly, but I do think it's a thundering lie. What is your opinion, Don Ramon?' he added, addressing the One-eyed Snake.

Ya Roni Sarka took time to consider before he replied.

'Senor,' he said, 'I withheld an opinion. I have heard of things more wonderful than this, and which I have subsequently ascertained to be true in every particular. I have seen things done which could only be done by invisible and imma-

terial beings, gifted with intelligence at least equal to our own.

‘Call it witchcraft, call it magic, demonology, what you will, there remains this plain stubborn fact, that there are unseen powers which, under certain conditions, can manifest and exert themselves on ourselves, caged up, as we are, within this human carcase.

‘Let us suspend our decision on this extraordinary man. As to his statement about his extraordinary weight, perhaps that may be a piece of Dutch-Yankee pleasantry, intended to amaze the ignorant and to amuse the more intelligent, by its tremendous extravagance. I shall know presently. I have a more intimate acquaintance with the history of Peru, I believe, than any man in the world.

‘If what he says be true, this man must be able, by personal experience, to tell me of many things of which I can only know by reliable chronicles. To-night, before he continues his story, I will question him as to his knowledge of those times.’

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE COPPER DUTCHMAN CONTINUES HIS STORY.

SAMSON VON BURR, true to his time, made his appearance in the evening, and seeming to be aware that the statement as to his age was not implicitly believed, at once alluded to the subject.

‘Seems to me, gentlemen, that you’re rather staggered at hearing me talk of being alive and

seven years old a hundred and twenty-three years ago.'

'Wall,' replied Peter Carder drily, 'it air rather a staggerer, specially considering that you don't look more than forty at the outside.'

'I was forty-two, gentlemen, when the extraordinary adventure I'm about to relate happened to me. Since that time I hav'n't shown any signs of increasing age, nor yet do I feel one jot less strong and vigorous than I did eighty years ago. I do grant that it's a right down extraordinary state of affairs, but I don't see that there's anything miraculous or impossible about it. Look at the patriarchs—they were young men at five hundred years. Seems to me there's nothing in the human body to prevent it's living on, repairing and replenishing itself. It's only a failure of vital force which causes decay, and I don't at all see why a man may not be endowed with vital force enough to keep the body, the human machine, in order for a hundred and seventy or more years, as well as seventy only.'

The Copper Dutchman pursued the argument at considerable length, arguing his case with great shrewdness and skill.

We need not follow him through all his discourse, which had very considerable effect on his listeners.

Presently the One-eyed Snake, seizing an opportunity, proceeded to question him as to his knowledge of Peru a hundred years back.

The Last of the Incas was truly astonished at the great and minute knowledge he possessed. He was able to describe particularly scenes and events which had occurred more than a hundred years

back, and this he did with such vraisemblance that it was almost impossible to doubt he had actually witnessed what he described.

Ultimately Ya Roni Sarka declared himself satisfied.

Andrew Battel, rather a slow thinker, felt bewildered, in a sort of mist, as it were; and even he was inclined to give weight to the words of the Copper Dutchman.

Even Peter Carder, undoubtedly the most sceptical of the three, was disposed to acquiesce.

'Well, look here, mister,' he said, 'it's real downright wonderful, all this you've been telling us of. It aint for me to say, plain, downright out, and as it kind o' strikes me it don't make no sort of difference. Well, I'll just swallow that great thundering pill of yours, and put it down as true. Now, blaze away, and let's have the story.'

And thus it was quietly agreed between our friends that the extraordinary statements of Samson Von Burr concerning himself were to be taken unquestioned. Samson Von Burr proceeded with his narrative.

'I'll just make my story as short as I can, mister,' he said, before beginning; 'and if you have any questions to ask, I'll try to give straightforward answers.'

'When we arrived at Lima there were still traces of the terrible calamity which had befallen the town and the country. Matters, however, were slowly improving, and in the course of a few weeks my father was enabled to get together a sufficient number of labourers, Indians, bullock-draws, teams, and so forth, to form a caravan.

‘In less than two months after our arrival, we started to cross the mountain range or cordillera of Peru. After a tedious journey, attended by both dangers and hardships, our party arrived at the copper mines.

‘They were situated at the foot of the eastern slopes of the Peruvian Andes, and beyond, to the south-east and south, there lay thickly-wooded plains and sierras, interspersed with broad tracts of desolate prairie.

‘Numerous tribes of Indians, some savage, living by war and plunder, others peaceful, subsisting on the wild animals with which those regions teemed; other tribes, even, earning a hard and scanty livelihood by fishing in the great streams which abounded, all flowing to the eastward, finally to fall into the still more gigantic Amazon.

‘But to return to the copper mine. The huts were rebuilt, the machinery repaired, and in the space of six months, copper ore was brought in considerable quantities from the bowels of the earth.

‘Notwithstanding, it was by no means a lucrative undertaking. Month after month, year after year, my worthy father toiled on, himself setting a rare example of industry and endurance, absolutely doing nearly as much work as any two of the Indians or hired labourers.

‘As I gained size and strength, I was set to work, and by the time I was twelve years old, tall and strong for my age, I could do at least half a man’s work.

‘I cannot say that I at all liked the weary monotonous toil, and yet for twenty years I worked on as man and boy, spending the greater portion

of the year in gloomy underground caves and tunnels.

‘My great delight, almost only pleasure, was an occasional excursion, or rather voyage of discovery, through the vast virgin forests.

‘On one occasion, accompanied by only one white man, a Spaniard, and a dozen Indians, we travelled nearly a thousand miles into far regions which had never before been trodden by the foot of white man.

‘We were well armed, lived on the spoils of the chase, and were able successfully to beat off the attacks of the savage tribes with which we came in contact. It was thus that I acquired the knowledge I possess, not only of Peru proper, where the invading Spaniards have taken root, but of distant and unknown regions, where there dwell strange nations, whose existence is unknown and undreamed of by so-called civilised men.

‘I myself, on the top of a lofty peak, have seen afar off, glistening in the rays of the setting sun, a great city, seemingly of white marble. I was able to discern great dome-shaped buildings gleaming with gold and silver. This city must have been of enormous magnitude; for, although at a great distance, it occupied many degrees of the horizon. I strove to reach it, as I did other cities which I beheld afar off in the same manner; but accident or evil fortune always defeated my attempts.

‘Invariably as I approached these fairy cities, willing to risk all, life even, in order to solve the mystery, I found the country grow more difficult, intersected with deep and rapid rivers, almost impenetrable thickets, and impassable swamps and morasses; the Indian tribes more savage and

aggressive, the climate more unhealthy, flying ants and other insects tormenting beyond endurance, and venomous reptiles swarming every where.

‘This latter danger I was fortunately able to provide against. In an encounter with a body of Indians, ten times our number, we gained the victory by reason of our firearms and the superior discipline of my men. We took some prisoners—amongst them an old man, reputed to be a magician. He himself was a prisoner, and condemned to death, accused of having bewitched a chief. The prisoners expected death, which, had we fallen into their hands, would undoubtedly have been our fate, and seemed perfectly stupefied when informed that they would be liberated on giving their solemn oath not to molest our party any more.

‘The old snake-charmer, however, begged hard to be allowed to remain with us, having a lively anticipation and terror of being burned alive, unless the chief should quickly recover from his malady, which was by no means probable.

‘Accordingly, he was allowed to remain with us, and from him I learned not only the art of taming or subjugating snakes and reptiles in general, but many other strange and wonderful things.

‘Of these I will speak more anon, and will now return to the copper mine, at the foot of the Peruvian Andes.

‘When I was thirty-five years of age my father died. My younger brother and sister had both gone to their last home several years previously, as had my mother. Thus I found myself sole repre-

sentative of the family, inheritor of the copper mine, and all other property.'

'Guess we'd better have a bit of supper,' here put in Peter Carder, 'and then you can finish your yarn afterwards.'

This proposition was at once agreed to.

'Notwithstanding my great love of travelling and wild adventure,' continued the Copper Dutchman, after supper, 'I had in me a strong leaven of the old-fashioned Dutch—prudence in thrift, as regarded worldly affairs.'

'I discovered that, in a money point of view, I was by no means in such a position as I wished. Now I don't want to make any disguise about it—I wanted to be a rich man. I still want to be a rich man, and I mean to be a rich man, not so much for my own sake as for that of Nina Rosa. Still, there's the fact: I mean making a big pile o' dollars, and that's why I have joined you in this idol's eye adventure. Well, I found that, reckoning every thing, I could count on being worth more than ten thousand dollars—two thousand pounds English money. The copper mine looked promising, however, and I determined to stick hard at it for a couple of years. We had indications of a new lode in the neighbourhood of the present workings, almost certain indications to experienced miners. But to get at this new, and probably rich, vein and lode, continuous and long-continued labour was necessary. I did not hope to be able to reach it under two years. Now, misters, I'm a stubborn man—I may say, without boasting, a determined man: I made up my mind I'd get at this lode, and stick to the work till I did.'

'So I made a solemn oath that I would go

down the mine, and not come up again to the light of day for three years, or until we struck the lode.

‘I kept my vow, but with consequences most extraordinary to myself. In the cavernous depths and recesses of the mine there were always cozing out from the roofs, walls, and floors, various gases. The whole of the earth was more or less impregnated with copper, and some of these gases had an absorbent effect on that metal, so that I actually breathed an atmosphere laden with copper.

‘That there was and is something unusual and extraordinary in my constitution there can be no doubt, for no others of the working party underwent the same extraordinary bodily change. Breathing this copper-laden air, the metal contained therein was absolutely taken up in the blood, and, by a slow but never-ceasing process, actually deposited in the tissues, muscles, bones, and organs of the body.

‘On my skin it had the effect which you now see, although it was not until the final catastrophe that the surface of my body assumed its present bronzed appearance, with distinct and unmistakable metallic lustre.

‘I found also that I constantly and steadily increased in weight, notwithstanding the fact that I toiled harder than a galley-slave. My weight increased gradually from eleven to sixteen stone, although I got not a bit bigger in bulk.

‘I did not think much of this, nor of the strange bronze hue my skin assumed, but worked on steadily, stubbornly, determined to reach the lode.

‘Week by week, month by month, the tunnel I was driving progressed, and constantly I met signs that I was drawing near to the goal for which I

was toiling, and at last there came for me the joyful day which crowned with success two years of incessant labour, during which I had never once seen the light of day.

‘The lode proved to be rich beyond my wildest anticipations. In fact, it was almost all pure copper. I was able to calculate that in six months I could easily send to the surface copper to the value of half a million dollars. I beheld myself a rich man—an enormously wealthy man.

‘But then came the tremendous catastrophe which, at the same time, robbed me of the reward of incessant toil, and also made me what I am—the Copper Dutchman, of a ton and a quarter weight.’

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE STORM—DEATH OF THE MINERS.

‘THE discovery of the new and rich lode of copper was quite sudden,’ continued the Copper Dutchman, ‘although for days previously I knew, by many indications, that it could not be far off.

‘During the years my predecessors had worked the mine, they had tunnelled away a great distance from the shaft.

‘I myself was not present at the actual discovery of the vein, which I fondly believed was to make my fortune; it was discovered by one of the working gang of Indians.

‘For a week or so previous to this memorable day I had been ill—nervous and generally out of sorts. I could not tell what was the matter with me. Strange phantoms haunted me—strange

dreams and visions; I thought of nothing but copper—could think of nothing but copper.

‘It really seemed as though my mind as well as my body had become imbued with that saturnine element. The very aspect of the earth and heavens seemed to me to be changed. I viewed everything, as it were, by means of a copper mirror.

‘The weather at this time was very extraordinary. I remember thunderstorms devastated the plains and swept the forest slopes of the mountains, tearing up trees, loosening huge rocks, and otherwise manifesting elemental rage.

‘It appeared as though, from some occult reason, the mysterious and wondrous force which causes lightning and thunder was accumulating in the air and the earth in the neighbourhood of the copper mines. It was as though the ground was becoming highly charged with electricity.

‘I myself experienced a most extraordinary feeling; I felt as though I was about to go off with a loud explosion, and be blown into a thousand fragments.

‘Vainly I strove to drive away the strange thoughts and feelings which possessed me.

‘I consulted the old snake-charmer. He declared that I was bewitched—under the malignant influence of a great and powerful spirit—the Spirit of the Copper Mountain, whom I had bitterly offended by trespassing on his domains.

‘He declared, moreover, that I could only cast off this spell by slaying and sacrificing at least twenty human beings to the offended deity or demon, whichever the case might be.

‘He coolly proposed that I should slaughter

twenty of the least efficient Indians to attain the desired end. I need not say that I scouted the idea with horror.

‘Well do I remember the day on which the new vein was discovered.

‘The wooden house where I resided was distant fully half a mile. The afternoon was sultry; the atmosphere was utterly oppressive; it seemed to have a stupefying, numbing, and deadening effect on all creation.

‘The horses and cattle drooped their heads; men and women moved slowly and lazily about, as though under the influence of some powerful narcotic; the ants, and flies, and other insects ceased to buzz, and bite, and sting.

‘The birds, though the sun was still some hours high, had retired to the forest trees. Even the leaves of the trees drooped and seemed withering.

‘The sky was overcast. Huge masses of great leaden-coloured clouds moved slowly about the mountain tops, gradually unfolding and extending, till it seemed that the whole vault of heaven would be covered by a funeral pall.

‘There was dismay in every heart. Each one looked in his fellow’s face, conscious of some impending disaster, trembling, and fearfully wondering as to its nature.

‘Such a state of things might well have characterised the eve of the Deluge. And yet amidst the prevailing gloom and terror human greed and desire for wealth was not extinguished in these copper miners. They were paid by way of royalty, so much copper ore out of every ton being assigned to the part of the men who had dragged it forth from the bowels of the earth.

‘Great noise and tumult about the works announced to me the fact of the discovery of the new mine.

‘The Indians and half-breeds were waging a bloody contest to decide which should have the working of the richest parts of the new mine. They were actually fighting with knives and fire-arms, down amongst the gloomy caverns and tunnels hollowed out of the mountain.

‘Many were wounded, and six or seven killed outright; and I, attended by a faithful body-guard, descended the mine to put an end, if possible, to this dreadful underground warfare.

‘In vain! Furious passions and the cupidity of these half savage races were excited, and I found myself powerless to control them.

‘Presently there burst over the mountain a tremendous storm of lightning, thunder, and rain.

‘I remember a fearful glare of ghastly blue light, a shock, a loud roaring noise, and then all was dark.

‘For the time I experienced utter oblivion and annihilation. I came to myself after more than twenty-four hours of unconsciousness. All but myself had perished by this tremendous lightning-stroke. The mills and machinery were utterly destroyed, and the mine for ever ruined.

‘I found myself as I now am, the lightning-shock having had the effect of a galvanic battery, and driving the metal into the very tissues of the body.

‘That was how it happened, gentlemen, that I am now a ton and a quarter in weight.’

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE ROAD—THE WRECKED VESSEL—A CONFLICT.

TO the south and south-west of the Indian and the Caribbean Sea, the scene of so many desperate adventures and exploits in years gone by, when there were richly laden and poorly armed merchantmen crawling slowly over the ocean, and Spanish galleons bearing vast treasures in gold and silver bullion; when there were pirates and buccaneers in abundance to rob them of their treasures and murder their crews.

To the south-west of those regions, a few degrees on the other side of the equator, lies the north-east coast of South America.

Here is to be found British Guiana—the free state of Venezuela—noted as one of the most prolific regions in the world for wild horses, wild buffaloes, and other large animals.

Also here is situated French Guiana, where is the penal settlement abhorred and dreaded by many Frenchmen, and known as Cayenne.

These three states or districts boast of some amount of civilisation, as each has a large admixture of Europeans, or those of direct European descent.

But there are also vast tracts of land along the

coast inhabited only by tribes of Indians, who live by hunting and fishing; some few, far up the country, who actually till the soil, plant seed, and await the result.

Into this sea many rivers empty themselves, all flowing from the south and south-west—from the far-away interior of this vast continent.

Amongst these is one of the mightiest rivers in the world, ranking with the Amazon and Mississippi in length, width, and volume of water.

This is the Rio Negro, or Black River, whose sluggishly flowing dark-coloured current flows on from near the upper waters of the great Amazon—which queen of rivers, originating near the centre of the great continent, flows to the eastward and southward, finally pouring itself into the Atlantic Ocean.

It is to a certain spot on a low, barren, sandy coast, about a day's journey from the Delta or mouth of the Rio Negro, that we wish to direct the reader's attention.

We will give him a bird's-eye view of the whole situation, as it might have been seen by the great American fishing eagle, which strong-winged bird of prey, soaring many thousand feet above the earth and sea, can command an immense panoramic view of all beneath him.

Soaring aloft, with almost motionless wings, but head ever restless, eye ever keen and on the watch for unwary dolphin or bonetta, which in ignorant innocence may happen to show itself at the surface, this powerful bird is ever on the alert, ready at any moment to launch himself down through the air with the velocity of a thunderbolt and plunge into the sea; the result being, in

almost every case, a few moments of disappearance, followed by the great bird reappearing and soaring upwards somewhat slowly and labouring now, for he bears in his talons a fish a third his own weight.

It is a dead calm—no breath disturbs the air, and there is not a ripple to be seen on the glassy surface of the sea, only the long slow swell of the great ocean.

The whole scene seemed bathed in sunshine. The fishers have rough, deep cool retreats from the scorching glare of the surface; and no living creature is to be discerned in the air or in the sea, save, perhaps, the slow-swimming, sullen shark, which in the calmest weather, and searching tropical sun, delights in prowling about, just showing his back-fin at the surface.

And this great predatory monster of the seas is too big and heavy and dangerous with his great mouth and murderous teeth to be molested in his own element, by even our strong-winged, sharp-clawed aquila.

Stay! Did I not say just now that there was no living creature in sight?

That was a mistake: I should have said no creature of the lower creation.

For there were human beings in sight, and as our friend the strong-winged eagle was an acute and intelligent bird, and as obviously there was no hope of a fish dinner, it may fairly be presumed that his curiosity was aroused.

What, then, was it he saw with those quick, brilliant, ever-watchful eyes of his? We will proceed to describe to the reader the scene, and what passed beneath our cloud-soaring bird.

A vessel stranded about a mile from the shore, not on rocks, but on a bank of sand. It was a barque, apparently of about 400 tons burden.

Her topmasts were gone, much of her bulwarks swept away, her jibboom gone, two boats out of the three smashed, and her rigging and spars in such a condition, that our fish-hunting eagle (whom we may fairly presume to have some knowledge of nautical matters) could tell that she had been exposed to a very severe gale, which had probably driven her ashore on this coast.

And the scene, all that is going on.

Even at this lofty height our sharp-eyed friend can hear as well as see. The rattling report of firearms, the shouts of excited men.

A fierce conflict is evidently in progress on the deck of the barque, shipwrecked though she be.

One party—forward in the bows—six only.

The other—eleven in number—attacking from the cabin and after-port.

The party of six comprises four friends: Andrew Battel, Peter Carder, the One-eyed Snake, and the Copper Dutchman, Samson Von Burr.

They are waging a desperate conflict—a battle for life or death.

Let us descend and see the affair and all that follows.

CHAPTER II.

A DANGEROUS POSITION.

FIRST of all it is desirable to acquaint the reader with the circumstances which led to the conflict raging on board.

The vessel was a Portuguese barque, commanded by a Portuguese captain, who was also part owner. Her crew were mostly Portuguese and Spaniards. There was, however, an Irishman, who had been shipped on board the craft while in a state of intoxication.

Also there was a negro, a big fellow, ebony black in colour.

This man had shipped as cook, a berth much affected by the sons of Africa and their descendants, probably because of the warmth of the galley, where the fire was kept in from early morning till late at night.

These two, the big Irish sailor and the negro, were the only two, beside our party of four, who spoke the English tongue perfectly, though the captain and some of the men boasted of being able to use a vile jargon which they considered English.

Naturally these two associated more with the four passengers than with the mixed crew of Portuguese and Spaniards.

The characters who may be considered joint heroes of our story had taken passage in this barque, the *San Lorenzo* by name, in Boston. She was the only vessel which could sail for the port they wished to reach for a month. So, though she was by no means a desirable craft, they paid their passages and took all their belongings on board.

They had not been many days at sea before they discovered that the captain was a drunkard—at times a furious madman; that the officers were cruel, unscrupulous, greedy wretches; and that the crew, though very bad seamen, were most thorough scoundrels.

Caught by one of the terrible tropical hurricanes in the Caribbean Sea, the vessel was, through bad seamanship, driven hundreds of miles out of her course, and finally stranded on the north-east coast, near the mouth of the Rio Negro.

She was bound to a port near the mouth of the Amazon, more than two thousand miles distant, and there appeared little hope of her ever reaching it. There was a sandy bottom, with great numbers of sandbanks where she went ashore, and as the gale abated immediately afterwards, she lay nearly upright, but little injured as regarded her hull, firmly imbedded in the sand.

Our four heroes very soon decided that there was little or no hope of getting the vessel off and continuing the voyage to the port originally intended.

Accordingly a bold proposal of the One-eyed Snake was, after due discussion, adopted.

It was this :

Their original plan was to make their way into the far distant interior by following, from the sea upwards, the course of the great river Amazon. It is obvious that a great river does not pass over mountains or ranges, but winds its course through valleys and ravines, rising always from mouth to source slowly, almost imperceptibly.

Hence, whenever the journey is to be made by land, the traveller will always do well to follow the course of a river.

But, in addition to this, there are many other reasons in favour of following the course of a river, winding though it be.

Abundance of fresh water, the chance of catching fish, the certainty that the wild animals of the

forest will always be met with in the neighbourhood of rivers. This applies also to birds, as in tropical regions, where there is often no rainfall for many months together, it is absolutely necessary that all drinking creatures should be within reach of a river or stream of some sort.

Yet another reason, and one of great import to travellers through wild and difficult countries, why they should, wherever possible, keep to the river-basins in making their way up country.

Water carriage.

Many tons may be conveyed up or down a river by means of oars and paddles, or, still better, when it is available, a brisk breeze, when it would be a matter of hard and desperate exertion, even with the aid of oxen or horses, to drag or carry one ton over a rugged and hilly country.

Every one who knows anything about travelling in wild, dangerous, and often unknown regions, is well aware that it is necessary to be well provided with provisions, in the most portable possible shape (as pemmican, for instance), as well as arms, ammunition, implements, medicines, camping apparatus—all which comprise a multitude of items of which those who have never had actual experience would not dream.

And, in addition, it is often an absolute necessity, in penetrating into a savage country, to employ beasts of draught and burden, and also, very often, a number of the natives, without whose aid in negotiating with savage tribes, and in many other ways, it would not be possible to proceed.

Now to return to the proposal of Ya Roni Sarka, last of the Incas. It was startling enough, and worthy of his enthusiastic nature.

‘We cannot get to the port we started for,’ he said. ‘Another storm may arise at any moment, and the result would be the total destruction of the vessel, stranded as she is. For our lives would be in danger, and, as almost a certainty, we should lose the whole of our baggage and equipment, in which event, though we safely reached the shore, our expedition would be cut short at the very commencement. We should be baffled, disappointed, ruined men, and as such, have to return as best we could, just subjects for ridicule and contempt. Let us, then, take time by the forelock, and availing ourselves of this calm, launch our boat—the wagon-punt—put all our baggage in her, and land her, leaving our drunken captain and his rascally crew to do the best they can. We know, by our charts and observations, that we are at no very great distance from the Rio Negro. Let us land, make a march inland, strike that great river, and follow its course into the far-away interior. I know that it will lead us to within two hundred miles of the Upper Amazon and the Rio Marañón. It is true that this journey has never yet been accomplished, nor even attempted, by living man; but that is no proof that we cannot do it. At all events, let us make the attempt. I know that the current of the river is slow, and I do not believe that the difficulties and dangers would prove greater than in following the course of the Amazon.’

This was the proposal of Ya Roni Sarka, and, after very brief discussion, it was adopted.

Our four heroes at once proceeded to put their project into execution—with what immediate results shall be told in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III.

PREPARING FOR A SIEGE.

It happened, however, that there arose a serious difficulty in carrying out the proposed plan of the One-eyed Snake—an obstacle which seemed likely to prove insuperable, and might have been so to any of less determination and energy than our friends.

The drunken captain refused to permit them to leave the ship, declaring that in a short time the vessel would float off and be able to continue her voyage.

Fortunately this had been foreseen, and preparations made by our adventurers to carry out their plans despite the opposition of the captain, who was joined in this respect by the majority of the blackguard crew.

They were berthed in a deck-house between the cook's galley and the main-hatch ; and, though by right they were entitled to cabin fare, they chose to board themselves, arranging with the black to cook for them.

Thus they avoided the company and society of the captain and two officers, who from the first they discovered were not likely to be agreeable companions.

This, though it saved the captain's money—as he had no food to provide—deeply incensed him. A passionate ruffian, his pride, such as it was, was wounded by these four—the only passengers—so studiously shunning his company.

And, moreover, there lay, deep down in the

recesses of his mind, another thought, which, perhaps, he had not absolutely put into tangible shape. He knew our adventurers were well-to-do.

He suspected they were rich ; and as, of course, they did not confide in him their intentions, he thought they had a great sum of ready money with them, and they intended either to settle or to embark in business in South America.

Now, it so happened—and most fortunately, as it turned out—that when our friends put their belongings on board the hold was full. So the whole of the heavy baggage—much of it carefully stored—was in the extraordinary nondescript affair which had so astonished Peter Carder—the wagon-boat.

When the vessel stranded, Don Ramon, knowing Spanish well, sought an interview with the captain, and suggested the advisability of abandoning the vessel, at least for the present, and getting ashore by means of the one boat remaining.

But the captain, who happened to be in about the middle of one of his drinking bouts, scouted the idea.

The One-eyed Snake then proceeded to hint that, he and his companions being passengers, and having a boat of their own, were at liberty to land if they chose, and if there appeared no probability of the ship being got afloat they would do so.

Hereupon the skipper flew into a most furious rage, cursed and blasphemed, and swore he would shoot any and every man who should attempt to leave the ship.

The Snake prudently backed out, and feigned to dismiss the proposal from his mind.

On discussion, it was promptly decided by our

friends that it was certain the captain, probably backed by the crew, would oppose their landing by violence.

Notwithstanding this they determined that the attempt should be made, and that if they were molested they would make a fight of it.

Now it happened, fortunately, that the afore-said Irish sailor and the black cook were much dissatisfied with the state of affairs, and, after having been carefully sounded and tested, they agreed to join our four adventurers, not only in going ashore, but in their proposed expedition into the far-away interior in search of a vast treasure.

They were not informed of the exact nature of this treasure, but were assured liberal wages, punctually paid, and, in the event of success, a thousand English sovereigns in addition.

They accepted the offer, and went heart and soul into the enterprise, so that as our friends were well provided with arms, the odds against the captain, two mates, and crew were by no means so overwhelming as might at first sight appear.

Another thing in their favour was that the crew lived, not as is usual in English and American ships, but in another deckhouse abaft the mainmast. Thus our four friends had full possession of all the forepart of the ship, a fact which they did not fail to turn to immediate advantage.

On the very night after the interview of Ya Roni Sarka with the captain, they crept from their berths and made their way beneath the top gallant forecastle, where were stowed the punt and all their belongings.

The crew were all in a half-drunken sleep, even the man supposed to be keeping watch.

Tools were ready to their hand, and they at once proceeded to cut away the timber and plank-ing, and so make a hole in her bows, big enough to admit the punt to be passed through and so launched.

It would have been impossible to take her out on deck, and launch her in face of a determined opposition, which they might certainly expect.

The work was well and quickly done, and almost finished during the night. But that 'almost' was disastrous. When day came it was still fine and calm, but there were indications of a coming breeze, and the punt could only float on calm water.

Consequently it was necessary that the attempt should be made at once.

Accordingly in broad day the hole in the bows was made large enough, and our friends, seeing discovery was inevitable, boldly proclaimed their cause, having first erected as stout a barricade as was possible under the circumstances. Behind this they succeeded in placing all their baggage, and the punt was laden and ready for launching.

This, however, was a difficult operation, and scarcely possible, even, unless they were quite unmolested. Consequently it was necessary to beat off the Portuguese and Spaniards, should they attack, and inflict on them such loss as to prevent their making the attempt again.

From behind this barricade, then, the One-eyed Snake hailed the captain in the Spanish tongue.

'Capitano!'

'Hallos!'

'We are going to launch our boat, and go

ashore—with your leave, and in all peace and friendship, if you choose; but under any circumstances we mean to go, and advise you not to molest us, as we are well armed, and will fight to the death.'

The reply was five shots from the captain's revolver, and the conflict before alluded to at once commenced.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE FIGHT.

THE sharp reports of the captain's revolver quickly brought the crew and two mates on deck; but some time elapsed before they could all be armed and ready for an attack, and they were too prudent to make a rush, in obedience to the captain's infuriated shouts, to seize the mutineers. They saw that all our friends were well armed—armed, too, with revolvers and repeating rifles.

Meanwhile, our friends made the utmost of this delay. Peter Carder, Samson Von Burr, the big black, and the Irish sailor, as the four strongest, laboured with desperate energy to get the punt launched through the hole they had cut in the ship's bows.

Andrew Battel and the One-eyed Snake, each crouching at a loop-hole in the barricade, through which protruded the muzzle of a Henry repeating rifle-carbine, were prepared to resist and frustrate an attack.

'Speak to them once again, Don Ramon,' said Andrew Battel, in a hurried whisper. 'I would

not shed blood if it were possible to avoid it. Tell them there are six of us armed, and determined men, with arms and ammunition sufficient for sixty. Tell him that all we require is to go free with our baggage; tell him also that if he again fires, or tells his men to, we shall return it with deadly effect.'

Don Ramon at once did as requested, hailing the captain in the Spanish tongue.

The reply was a double volley of bullets from his revolver, which he had just re-loaded, and the most blasphemous oaths.

By this time his crew of desperadoes had armed themselves, mostly with rusty cutlasses, old muskets, and single-barrelled horse-pistols—very poor weapons to oppose to such deadly ones as repeating-rifles and six-barrel revolvers.

Now, though the captain had an idea that his passengers were tolerably well armed, he allowed his fury and greed to get the better of his prudence. He knew that they were well provided with money in hard gold and silver. This he learned from the shipping agent, through whom they took their passage.

Drunken ruffian though he was, he was shrewd enough when a case of unlawful gain presented itself.

Instantly this thought entered his mind, and the determination to act upon it quickly followed.

'Mutiny! mutiny! They shall go ashore—fools that they are. I shall seize all their property and land them as they stand, and then I'll get the vessel off, and sail away, a richer man by a good many thousand dollars.'

This prompted him to instant action, and the

greed of gain superseding any amount of courage, he at once ordered and prepared to lead an attack.

To get the arms of his men loaded, and themselves in something like order and disposition, occupied perhaps half a minute ; but ere that time elapsed, he found he had calculated without his host. Again Andrew Battel whispered to his companion. 'We must fire, but let us spare life, if possible. We are both good shots. We know that our carbines are of deadly precision ; let us hit them on the arms or legs. Three shots each, Don Ramon ; that will stagger them for a bit, I think.'

The sharp crack of six rifle shots followed in rapid succession, five of which took effect. Two men fell shot through the leg, two received each a shot in the right arm, and one—the bullet going a little higher—was struck in the shoulder. The first shot, which, by a sudden movement of the captain's head, failed to take effect, was destined by Don Ramon for the captain's brain, for he was by no means inclined to be as merciful as Andrew Battel.

The bullet, however, cut a small piece from his ear, which, with the fact of seeing five of his men disabled, was sufficient to cool his ardour considerably.

The wounded men—two of them lying helplessly wounded on the deck, three of them howling with pain, quite useless for any fighting purposes—put a stop to any immediate attack.

With a good deal of confusion the wounded were dragged back into the cabin, the captain himself being by no means the last to get under shelter.

The forbearance and mercy, however, of Andrew Battel were not duly rewarded. He had hoped that after receiving so severe a lesson they would proceed no further.

In this they found themselves greatly disappointed. Only one of the men was badly hurt, the rest having merely received flesh wounds. The skipper, intent on his plan of plundering our friends as soon as he had himself under shelter, proceeded to stir up the avarice of the sailors by promises of a considerable portion for each one of the gold of the passengers, which he represented, solely by guesswork, to be of very large amount.

Having succeeded tolerably well in this object, he proceeded to make a more secure breastwork across the deck, so as to keep out, if possible, those deadly leaden pellets which had already wounded five of his men.

Drunken ruffian that he was, he had sense and skill enough to direct a vigorous attack. He himself brought out ammunition, and, hastily loading all the muskets and pistols, a constant fire was kept up. Now, this was most embarrassing to the party forward; for, although they were tolerably well sheltered, it was a great hindrance to the process of getting the punt launched, being forced to do everything on their hands and knees.

And even then they were far from danger free; occasionally a bullet would find some chink or weak place in the rude breast-work they had thrown up, passing unpleasantly near their heads.

However, after the most desperate efforts the punt was got ready for launching through the bows, and as quickly as possible all the baggage was put on board.

Even when this was done there were other and terrible risks to be run.

Indeed, it seemed likely that it would not be possible to leave the vessel in the boat until the captain and his party had been utterly defeated and their fire silenced.

For there was rather a strong current running from bow to stern of the barque as she lay fixed in the sand. Consequently, the moment the punt should be cast adrift, it would, if left to itself, drift right past the broadside and after part of the vessel. This would expose those on board to a murderous fire at close quarters, from the small bullseye windows which were on either side of the cabin representing perfect loopholes, and giving those within almost perfect safety.

A brief consultation was held as to what should be done.

The Copper Dutchman was very emphatic in expressing his opinion.

‘Look here, comrades; it’s no good beating about the bush. I’ve got an idea of what’s the game of that drunken half-bred Spaniard. He knows we’ve got some dollars, and guesses we’re pretty warm that way. Well, it’s my opinion he means to rob us, and that’s why he won’t let us leave, and take our baggage. Guess we’ll have to jest about kill him, and a few more of his gang, before we’ll be suffered to get away. Let’s have Big Ben out, and give ’em a few of the half-pound plugs. I’m dead sure the cabin bulkhead can’t keep them out; and then, afterwards, we can give them a half-dozen of the self-exploding shells. Reckon they would startle ’em a bit, if so be they should burst in the cabin.’

‘Right you air, shipmate,’ said Peter Carder. ‘Let’s give them a few barks, and bites too, from Big Ben.’

Just at that moment there came a volley from the after part of the ship, and one bullet finding entrance slightly wounded Peter Carder on the neck.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIGHT CONTINUED—A PARLEY—THE CAPTAIN’S FURY.

‘CUSS their impudence!’ cried Peter, starting; ‘seems to me the sooner we get Big Ben out the better. Andrew, you and the Don just keep ’em quiet, while I fetch out the beauty. Guess I’ll load him with a good charge. The confounded skunks, to shoot me in the neck!’

The affair was now so serious that vigorous measures had to be adopted, and the hissing bullets of our friends’ repeating rifle-carbines kept the enemy close under cover.

A sharp fusillade was kept up on either side, till, in the course of a few minutes, Peter Carder came, or rather crawled, to the front, with Big Ben.

‘Give us a loop-hole, lads,’ he said, ‘and I guess I’ll give those coons a lesson. I’ve got a big plug in, and a clear ounce and a half of powder.’

Certainly it was a strange and terrible weapon, was Big Ben. A sort of rifled blunderbuss, carrying a plug of lead tipped with steel, about three inches in length, and over half a pound in weight.

‘Let her drive,’ said the Copper Dutchman.

'I felt the wind of a shot close by my ear, just now. Reckon those chaps are a-gettin' a little too lively, and must be calmed down a bit.'

And Peter Carder let drive with Big Ben.

As he proceeded to blaze away with this weapon, the loud report and rush of the heavy missile astonished the Spaniards considerably; but, however, not anything like the effect of the shot itself. For whereas the sort of barricade they had thrown up—of cabin furniture, tables, casks, cases, sails, bedding, and many other things—could keep out ordinary bullets, it was quite unable to resist the heavy plug or bolt of lead or iron which went crashing through all obstacles until it was brought up by the stout canvas of a sail tightly rolled up, and no further damage done beyond sending numerous splinters flying in all directions, and inflicting slight bruises and scratches.

But the skipper, drunken ruffian though he was, had sufficient sense to be aware that they had now got a much more formidable weapon to fear.

The next shot from Peter Carder was appalling in its effect.

It passed through a weak part in the rude defence the enemy had thrown up; struck one of the Portuguese full in the chest, went through his body, broke the arm of a man behind him, wounded a third, and then crashed right through the planking on the starboard side and into the sea.

The first unfortunate of course yielded up the ghost almost instantly, a great chasm having been torn in his body from heart to back.

It horrified the others, and there arose a clamorous demand to the captain to yield, as it

was impossible to fight against men armed with such deadly and terrible weapons.

The avaricious villain, however, was most unwilling thus to give up the booty he had in view. Moreover, he was half drunk and in a furious rage. Accustomed all his life to scenes of violence and bloodshed, he, though not a brave man in the proper sense of the word, had yet in a manner become inured to danger from lead or steel. Moreover, he was half a fatalist, and believed most devoutly in his patron saint, to whose shrine he every year gave candles, or plate, or money.

So, though not without a good deal of trouble, he overcame the reluctance of the crew to continue the struggle, increasing his promises of reward, and serving out to each man a pint of raw rum with which to wash the powder out of their throats, as he put it.

This had effect, and the skipper, who himself was getting sobered by the dangerous state of affairs, called a parley.

This was a stroke of cunning on his part, in order to give time for strengthening the barricade, loading the firearms, getting the hurts of the wounded attended to, and the dead body, a ghastly sight, out of the after cabin windows and into the sailor's great watery grave—the ocean.

‘Forward, there!’ he shouted in Spanish.

‘Hulloa!’ replied the One-eyed Snake, continuing to act as spokesman for the other side.

‘I propose a parley.’

‘What do you want to parley about?’

‘Come out on the deck and let's have a talk. I daresay we can settle it. There's no harm done on either side yet.’

This was a lie, and the proposal was intended to get one of the party out of shelter, when the treacherous villain meant to fire at him with the only rifle there was aft.

‘If you’ll come out first, or at the same time, I will do so, and hear what you’ve got to say; but I’m not such a fool as to give you a chance, Senor Pedro. I’ll give my word we won’t fire unless you do.’

Now, the captain wanted to come out on deck, not only for the purpose of trying to arrange terms—of which, by the way, he well knew there was scarcely any hope—but also to get a clear view of the arrangements forward under the forecastle, and what they were doing.

Now, though a desperate and treacherous villain himself, he yet had sufficient confidence in the honour of these passengers whom he designed to rob and murder as to believe they would not fire on him.

Accordingly, he replied, ‘Good. I will come forward as far as the gangway; you can do the same. I shall be armed with a pistol, but with no intention of using it unless you begin.’

After a few words to his two officers, on whom alone he could rely, as to what they should do in case he were fired at or in any way molested, he boldly stepped out on to the deck and advanced to the gangway, where he halted.

The moment, however, that the Peruvian followed his example and came from under cover, he went still farther forward to meet him.

This, though it seemed a most dangerous and rash proceeding on his part, was in reality a stroke of great cunning. For from the gangway he could

not see what was going on beneath the forecastle deck, by reason of the windlass and the obstructions our friends had put in the way for their safety.

When abreast of the cook's galley, however, he could see over the windlass.

Great was his astonishment, dismay, and fury when he perceived what they had been doing—the great gap which they had cut in the vessel's bows, and the preparations for launching the boat, or rather punt.

'Ten thousand devils!' he said, with many other and more terrible oaths. 'You have been cutting my ship to pieces—breaking her up as though she were an old hulk—'

'She soon will be,' replied the One-eyed Snake, 'certainly, for there's a gale brewing. You see, senor, we want to go ashore with all our belongings, and mean to do it. That's all.'

Another volley of oaths—'May I be cursed to all eternity if you do, though!'

'I expect you will be,' replied Ya Roni Sarka calmly.

The captain knew that, in face of what he now saw, they would never consent to give up their property.

Having seen all that he could see then of the forecastle, those there, and their doings, he judged it advisable to beat a retreat, after a very few words.

'You mean to say you'll leave the vessel, now that she's in some danger, in spite of me? It is not legal—by law you're as much under my command as though you belonged to the crew.'

Ya Roni Sarka smiled at hearing this lawless vagabond—for he was nothing less—use the word legal.

‘You’re under my orders, and it’s your duty to obey me.’

‘It’s not our duty to obey anybody at the sacrifice of our lives, or the loss of all we possess, even if we should get to shore when the vessel goes to pieces, as she’s sure to do.’

‘It’s a lie—she’s a stout and good vessel, and will float off in a tide or two.’

‘We do not believe it. A gale is even now brewing. In a few hours there will be such a surf running where there is now smooth water, that it will be impossible to land in any boat whatever. And in a few hours more the vessel will go to pieces, and if we are fools enough to stay here at your bidding, we shall be drowned. Anyhow we mean to go—peaceably if we can—if not, we will fight for our freedom of action. So now you know all about it.’

The Portuguese restrained his fury, and muttering something about consulting his officers, returned to the cabin, keeping his face always forward.

He knew right well that there was no chance of our friends, either of remaining themselves or leaving their property.

And the other party to this useless interview also felt sure, by the savage, surly manner of this fellow, that he was not likely to let them go without another struggle, necessitating teaching him a still more severe lesson.

So he too went back to his party, and communicated to them the result, and his opinions thereon.

CHAPTER VI.

A TERRIBLE WEAPON—A DILEMMA, AND A WAY
OUT OF IT.

‘SEE here, mates,’ said Peter Carder, ‘it’s sartin sure that coon don’t mean to let us go, if he can help it. He kinder hankers arter our belongings, I’m a-thinking. And also I’m a-thinking he ain’t goin’ to have his fancy gratified that way. So what we’ve got to do is just plain enough. I’ll stick to Big Ben; I’ve kinder took a fancy to the critter, and guess I’ll keep ’em quiet by a shell or two. You, Andrew, being a right down good shot, can stick to the Henry carbine, and make it so warm for ’em that not one will dare show a head. Then you other chaps can hurry off, and get this precious boat of ours out through the bows and afloat.’

It was not often that Peter Carder offered advice, but when he did it was usually sound, and on this occasion it was at once adopted.

Peter was well acquainted with the handling of Big Ben and its ammunition, and now commenced to treat the enemy with most deadly missiles. These were small shells with a sufficient bursting charge, which, when it struck any object, exploded, sending splinters flying in all directions. These produced jagged and most painful wounds, and striking the head, even a small splinter might easily cause death.

The effect when this conical-headed shell struck the human body, or the body of an animal, direct, was something frightful. Exploding as it entered, it blew a great hole, a ghastly chasm, in the living

body. This great gun, which had been made especially for our friends, was intended by them principally for big game.

They decided, principally on the evidence of Don Ramon and the Copper Dutchman, that a small bullet with great velocity would not do really so much damage as a large heavy projectile, even with less propelling force.

And so, on this principle, a terrible weapon, being Big Ben, was constructed. They tried it on a bullock before leaving, having obtained permission from a butcher, first, to slaughter it. By mistake a shell was used instead of a simple leaden plug. The effect was tremendous. The missile entered the skull between the eyes of the animal, passed through the neck, and exploded inside, between the shoulders.

In this case it proved its destructive properties were far too apparent; it absolutely blew the animal open, almost dismembering the fore-quarters, and rendering the meat quite unfit for the market.

Our friends had to pay the butcher for half the carcase of a fine fat bullock. So that the experiment was highly satisfactory as regarded the terrible power of their shell gun; but could hardly be considered so in a money point of view, as this single discharge cost them over seventy dollars. This, then, was the weapon armed with which Peter Carder crouched at the loop-hole, favouring the enemy in pretty regular succession with leaden plugs and iron shells.

Andrew Battel, meanwhile, kept up a constant and rapid fire with the Henry rifle, averaging ten shots a minute. This was both damaging and dangerous to the enemy. They dared not even show

a hand, and, moreover, many of the bullets passed through holes or weak places in their defence.

In additon to this, the big gun wielded by Peter Carder belched forth its deadly contents, sending shot or shell right through the strongest parts of the barricade.

This terrible fusillade effectually kept the enemy quiet, compelling them to crouch and lie down in the safest places they could find. After a time, however, firing from the forecastle ceased suddenly and entirely.

Just let us have a look at the doings forward, and see the reason of this sudden cessation of hostilities.

The Copper Dutchman, the One-eyed Snake, the nigger, and the big Irish sailor worked with such well-directed energy, that in a quarter of an hour their queer-shaped boat was got out through the gap in the bows, and safely lowered into the water; and in ten minutes more nearly the whole of their baggage, provisions, and belongings of every kind were put on board; stowed in a rough-and-ready manner, it is true, but still securely enough for the brief passage to the shore on this smooth sea.

This done, there was a brief discussion, a hurried council of war, in which Peter Carder and Andrew Battel took part, in the intervals of the firing, as to their plan of action.

It was obvious enough that the current would drift the boat alongside the vessel, past the gangway, quarter, and stern, and then they would be exposed to the fire of some ten muskets, at close range.

This could scarcely fail to prove very disastrous—for the enemy would be sheltered, firing from

out of little round bullseye ports no bigger than a small saucer, while those on board the punt, already laden and cumbered by their baggage, must necessarily be a good deal exposed.

How was this danger to be guarded against?

It was all-important that they should get clear off without even a serious wound; for what hope could they have of penetrating many thousand miles into the far interior of the great continent, when at the outset some of their party were wounded?

After some time, however, a scheme was hit upon—a bold and novel plan, dangerous, it is true, in execution, and with one most terrible peril, the thought of which might well make the bravest shudder.

Sharks!

For they decided that their best plan would be to lower themselves, not into the punt, but into the sea alongside, and after casting her adrift impel her towards the shore by their united efforts swimming. They would, they confidently calculated, be able to find shelter, by keeping the punt with the baggage piled to a considerable height constantly between them and the barque.

In a very few minutes they reckoned they would be out of range.

But there was yet another danger, a desperate danger, and one which it seemed almost impossible to avert.

The captain and crew, on seeing them about to escape—to slip through their fingers thus easily—would naturally use every possible means to prevent such an end to an already disastrous conflict.

There was the boat.

They would in all probability launch it, and give instant pursuit.

The boat, of course, provided with oars and of an entirely different build, would be both handier and swifter than the heavily laden punt. Also it had to be considered that our six friends would be swimming in the water, clinging to the gunwale of the punt; and though they might be able to control the motion of the punt, and propel her slowly through the water, they would be at the mercy of men in a boat with oars.

For—fatal fact—it would be impossible to get on board the punt so as to be able to use their fire-arms until they came to shallow water, where they could stand, say, about up to their waists.

Here, indeed, was a desperate dilemma!

It was almost a certainty that they would be fiercely pursued by the captain and crew in the one remaining boat of the barque.

Also that they would be taken at a fatal disadvantage, for the boat could take up any position at any distance she chose. And they, immersed in the water up to their necks, and comparatively helpless, could soon be destroyed by a fusillade even from old muskets.

What, then, was to be done? It was the One-eyed Snake whose keen acumen suggested the means of escape from this danger.

‘Senor,’ he said, ‘I see a way out of the difficulty. There is danger of their pursuing us in a boat. Well! there is but one boat available. Let us make it in such a condition that it will be no longer possible for them to use it in our pursuit.’

‘But,’ said Peter Carder, with an amount of

stupidity unusual for him, 'we can't get at it; it's hanging aft by the davits.'

'Ah! but you're wrong, my friend,' cried the One-eyed Snake; 'we can get at it.'

'Senor Carder,' turning to the big Yankee, 'do you not think you could reach it with that charming little plaything of yours, Big Ben?'

And then, all at once, there dawned on the minds of the other three the simple and efficacious plan of the astute Peruvian.

'Ah!' said Andrew Battel, 'I see; fire into the boat, and render her unseaworthy. But would not that be cruel? We destroy their only boat—their only means of getting on shore, only chance of life.'

'To the devil with them and their lives!' said the Copper Dutchman; 'one of their bullets passed between my arm and body about five minutes ago, and barked a piece of skin from one of my ribs. It would only be serving the vagabonds right if we scuttled the vessel and left her, so that she would founder if they ever did get her off the bank.'

The hard stern logic of the Dutchman prevailed entirely over the more humane views of Andrew Battel.

Peter Carder had made haste to reload Big Ben.

'Jerusalem!' he said, in a low tone, using his favourite expression, 'I reckon I can just about knock holes in that starboard-quarter boat,' and with that he let fly.

The loud roar of the discharge of Big Ben was quickly followed by the rush of the missile, and the sound of splintering wood.

The leaden plug struck the stern of the boat, high up above the water-line, however, so that there was no serious harm done.

‘Gently, gently, senor!’ said the One-eyed Snake, pressing his hand gently on the other’s shoulder. ‘We must do this quietly. We must not let them suspect that we are knocking holes in their only boat. Thus, when they launch her, will their defeat be more complete, and our escape more certain.’

‘This must be our plan. We must keep up a constant fire on the cabin where our enemies lie hidden, not so much to kill or wound, as to entirely occupy their attention, and prevent them from discovering what we’re up to with the boat. Then, during the firing, our friend here can occasionally send one of his plugs into the boat.’

‘How about a shell or two?’ asked Peter Carder; ‘guess that would blow a big gap in the boat right out.’

‘Well, no, I do not think that would do,’ replied the One-eyed Snake; ‘they would hear the explosion of the shell, and then we should fail in crippling the boat unknown to them.’

‘Besides,’ remarked Andrew Battel, always leaning to the merciful side of every case, ‘the shells would blow such large chasms in the weak planking as to render it impossible ever to make the boat seaworthy again. Now, I propose that we do not use Big Ben at all—pierce holes in her by means of the small conical bullets of the Henry rifles.’

‘That would be of no use at all,’ said the One-eyed Snake derisively. ‘Small, cleanly-cut holes such as these could be plugged up easily and quickly. If there should be no wood to make plugs, bits of rag torn from their shirts and rolled up, or scraps of canvas, would serve the purpose. I

myself have plugged bullet-holes in a canoe in that very manner.'

This was a very fair objection, and so it was decided that the only remaining boat of the enemy should be crippled, and through the agency of Peter Carder and the 'pretty little pop-gun,' as he playfully called Big Ben.

No time was lost in proceeding to action; and the captain and his party, who had begun to get emboldened at the cessation in hostilities on the part of these tough customers the passengers, soon learned that they must either yield the time in dispute, or be prepared to fight it out.

Previously, however, to beginning hostilities, the Peruvian again hailed the skipper:

'Senor Capitano, we have given you time to consider. Are you prepared to let us go in peace?'

'No, cursed villains of mutineers! I'll haul every one of you from the yardarm for this. I will, by all the saints in heaven!'

'You'd better, I think, invoke the devils in another place, senor,' replied Don Ramon sarcastically; 'and they could not aid you much. For we mean to go, if it's necessary to kill you and all your gang first. Now, think before you answer and we open fire again.'

A volley of oaths, and a sly shot from his revolver, were the captain's reply.

'Blaze away, lads!' said Don Ramon, crouching down to get under shelter. 'It's their own fault if they will have it.'

Then a rapid fire from Henry rifles and revolvers commenced.

CHAPTER VII.

A DANGEROUS POSITION.

THE repeating rifles and revolvers were so easily and quickly loaded, that it was found that one could keep a constant supply for the use of the other's firing, having frequent shots himself. The nigger and the big Irishman, being unpractised in the use of firearms, were employed in getting what few things remained of their belongings into the punt, which now lay securely moored under the bows.

Peter Carder, according to the arranged plan, kept up a steady fire—about once in every two minutes—one shot out of every three being aimed at the boat hanging to the davits.

This boat did not offer a good mark, as from where they were little more than her bow could be seen.

However, in the course of half an hour there were three great holes plainly visible, one of them smash through the stern-post, below the water-line.

After a few more shots it was judged that enough was done, that there was little or no danger of being pursued by the captain and his gang in their only boat, as she must infallibly sink in a very few minutes when set afloat.

Don Ramon, the One-eyed Snake, took the leadership and conduct of the affair by general consent, as he it was whose fertile brain had schemed out this very excellent plan of escape.

‘Now Andrew and Peter, and all of you,’ he said, ‘load all the firearms; one of you remain to hand them to me, and to hand them down into the punt when discharged, and the other four of you

lower yourselves into the water, and take up a position on the starboard side of the punt, taking care to choose a place where you can get a good grip of the gunwale. I'll keep up as sharp a fire as I can, and as I fire off the pieces Andrew Battel will place them in the punt. The noise of the firing will prevent the party aft hearing, and keep them from suspecting we are making so sudden a departure. If we are lucky, we may float right by the stern without being perceived. Now, Senior Peter, hand Big Ben down into the punt, and lower yourself into the water as quick as possible. Don't stay to fire again; hand it down, loaded as it is.'

Peter Carder obeyed, lowering himself into the water, and the others following suit. Don Ramon and Andrew Battel were left above, to fire the last shots.

As each piece was discharged, Andrew carefully placed it in the punt along with the others, close to the side, between the baggage and the gunwale.

Then, the last shot having been fired, our two friends also lowered themselves into the water, and Andrew cutting the rope which fastened her, she swung round, and began to drift slowly away.

'Now, lads, swim with all your strength, all of you, with one hand, holding on to the punt with the other, and let's get the boat as far from the sand as we can. Now for it!'

The painter was instantly cut, and the boat drifted at the mercy of the current, barring such influence as they could resist by means of their swimming powers.

The punt, aided by the vigorous exertions of the five who could swim, at once steered out from the hull of the vessel, and floated slowly towards

the stern, but still going in a diagonal direction, and away from her.

Also they were able to keep her so that they themselves clung to the side farthest from the ship, and so, helped by the pile of baggage on deck, were quite safe from the fire of the enemy—as safe as it was possible to be.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SUDDEN SQUALL—FURTHER PERIL—DON RAMON'S STRATAGEM.

THEIR hearts bounded high with hope, nay, with the almost certainty of escape, when suddenly there occurred one of those strange and unlooked-for occurrences, which, coming as they do sometimes, suddenly and without warning, at a critical juncture, seem utterly unaccountable on the theory of chance only. Without harming any kind, either in the sky or on the surface of the sea, there came a hard blast of wind—a heavy white squall, indeed, blowing right off shore.

Only a moment before their escape seemed certain, for those on board the vessel could do absolutely nothing—nothing, at least, beyond firing uselessly at the baggage and punt by which they were sheltered. Peter Carder, feeling certain, as did all the others now, of safe escape, was ‘chaffing’ Samson Von Burr. ‘Say, Mister Copper Dutchman,’ he remarked, ‘you seem to swim pretty light for a ton and a quarter.’

‘Guess I do. Inflate myself with air, like the

fishes : besides, you see, I'm holding on like grim death to the side of the punt.'

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the squall burst forth.

At almost the same instant followed their discovery by the captain and his host, which was signalled by a yell of rage and a harmless volley from the muskets.

In another minute the punt would have been clear of the vessel, and floating slowly away diagonally for the shore.

The force of this blast, however, was such as to bring about a great disaster.

Blowing from shore, towards the vessel, it proved more powerful than the current which was drifting them away—more powerful than the united efforts of all five who could swim, and, to their horror and dismay, they heard and felt the bump as the punt was blown against the larboard quarter of the barque.

Instantly a boat-hook was thrust forth from one of the cabin dead-lights, and a hold having been obtained of the rope which secured some of the luggage, the punt was securely held close to the vessel.

The situation was one of imminent and deadly peril. There was not an instant to spare. In a minute, at the outside, they would be exposed to a murderous fire at close quarters—themselves up to their necks in the water, and so utterly helpless; and, of course, in a very short space of time they would be all dead men; for there was, all knew, no hope of the rascally captain proving merciful should he get them in his power.

The man on board firmly held the punt close to

the vessel, whilst others were preparing to lower themselves down from the poop on to the punt, with loaded muskets.

This done, the rest was easy. They would only have to fire at the men in the water, at a distance of not more than a couple of yards. In fact, it was possible for a man on the top of the baggage to lie on his belly and place the muzzle of his musket close to the head of the victim.

There seemed no hope whatever.

Their last hour had come.

The negro's teeth chattered with terror, and the big sailor was very white.

'Our last hour has come,' said Andrew Battel; 'the Lord have mercy on our souls!'

'Amen!' responded Peter Carder.

And then they gave themselves up to the thought of immediate and certain death.

'Let us leave go and swim for it,' said Andrew Battel. 'It's a forlorn hope, I know, but it's no use holding on to the punt and have our brains blown out by these murderous villains. They may swim badly, and perhaps one of us may be able to swim ashore, and so take back the news of the fate of the others. I can hear them clambering down on to the punt.'

'Stay! don't let go. Samson, you, and Peter do your most desperate effort to hoist me over the gunwale. Use all your strength—strain till every blood-vessel is fit to burst. It is our last chance—our only chance—of life. Get me on board the punt, and I will warm them yet.' It was the One-eyed Snake who spoke.

It would be a task of the greatest difficulty for a man in the water to get on board this singular

boat of theirs, even were all clear. But there was only a little space between the gunwale and all sorts of things stowed on the punt.

The gunwale, too, unfortunately, was unusually high, and the task of hoisting up almost an impossibility.

The desperation of their situation nerved both Peter Carder and the other to a tremendous effort.

The enormous strength of the Copper Dutchman here came in most opportunely.

‘Now, then, both together!’ he cried. ‘Up he goes!’

The arms of the two strong men swelled out, and on their chests and shoulders the muscles stood out in hard bands and lumps.

It was soon decided.

Holding on to the gunwale of the punt with one hand, with the other each grasped Don Ramon just below the knee, and, he himself aiding all in his power, he was successfully hoisted out of the water down to his knees, and in an instant had clambered on board.

Not a moment did he lose. Big Ben, the great blunderbuss weapon which had already done such good service, lay ready loaded—and loaded with shell.

Seizing it, he clambered up on to the luggage. Two of the others were just on the point of coming on board from the mizzen-channels. Of these our friend did not take any immediate notice, but turned his attention to the man who, through one of the circular bullseye windows, still held the punt fast with the boat-hook.

To level the big gun at this port-hole was the work of a moment.

The effect was sufficiently appalling and disastrous to the enemy to satisfy our friends, and also wonderfully to improve their chance of escape.

The boat-hook was struck and shivered to pieces. This caused the explosion of the shell, which, first blowing off the head of the holder, scattered its deadly splinters in all directions, killing another man, and wounding four.

Without a second's pause Don Ramon turned his attention to the two men, who had by this time gained the punt. They had not, however, got their muskets in order, and besides were a good deal staggered by the sudden appearance and prompt action of the Peruvian.

He seized Big Ben, and whirling it round his head dealt savage blows at the two intruders.

There was danger by this course of seriously damaging this valuable and deadly weapon, but on the other hand there was the certainty of doing great damage to the skulls and bodies of those he attacked.

They fell all of a heap, like bullocks under the pole-axe of the slaughterer.

Meanwhile the sudden and violent squall had ceased, and the punt, no longer held by the boat-hook, slowly drifted clear of the vessel, and floated away astern.

The One-eyed Snake had by this stroke, so sudden and miraculous in conception and carrying out, saved all their lives.

He was now alone on the punt with the two dead men. On examining them he found the skulls of both were completely battered in by the tremendous blows he had delivered with the heavy butt of Big Ben.

Our Peruvian friend had a touch of grim humour in him—a sort of relentless, un pitying fun.

He wished to astonish his comrades in adventure, and at the same time show to them the completeness of his success.

So that, finding them both dead, he pushed them over together, so that they would fall into the water nearer the head of the punt than where the others were clinging.

A wild Irish howl followed immediately.

This proceeding might have ended badly for the Irishman, for the bodies falling in the water close to him, ghastly and blood-stained as they were, actually came in contact with him, by reason of the forward motion of the punt.

In his terror he let go his hold, and, struggling and shouting, drifted two yards from the punt.

‘Och! murder! Help! murder! I’m a dead man! Oh! ah!’

His cries were here smothered by the sea-water, and most likely he would have been drowned, had not Peter Carder, holding on to the punt with one hand, stretched forth his long arm, and seizing him by the neck, placed him in safety.

‘You must ha’ been a big fool to let go your hold, not bein’ able to swim,’ said Peter.

‘Oh! by the saints, mister, and it was a rale fright I got. A lot of dead men tumbling down on me from the skies, just as if there was a battle up in the clouds, and it was raining corpses!’

The Irishman, however, presently got over his terror, and the punt slowly, but surely, drifting away with the current, they were soon clear of the danger from that quarter. Vain yells of fury, and the firing of muskets equally useless—for Don

Ramon was careful to keep under shelter until quite out of range—were all the baffled captain and the remnant of his crew could do.

The Peruvian, presently looking out, saw them make for the boat, and begin to lower it. But evidently soon discovering how they had been outwitted in this matter, through the boat being rendered unseaworthy, this project was, of course, abandoned.

And now, beyond all doubt and question, our adventurers were beyond the power of the brutal Portuguese captain, afloat with their own craft and within an hour or so of the coast of South America, in the far-away interior of which vast continent they calculated gaining vast wealth.

CHAPTER IX.

CLEAR OF THE SHIP—A FURTHER PERIL—THE PILOT-FISH.

DON RAMON proposed that as he could do no good on the punt, now that they were out of range, and only added to her already heavy burden, he should join them again in the water, and do his best to urge her ashore by means of his swimming powers.

The proposal was a generous one, for though out of all immediate danger, the position in the water, holding on with one hand and swimming with the other, and with the legs, was not pleasant.

Moreover, as all worked hard it was very fatiguing.

This, however, was objected to principally and most urgently by Andrew Battel, who, though neither so quick in thought nor gifted with such marvellous fertility of expedient as Ya Roni Sarka, was prudent, and always thought as much of the future as of the immediate effect of any step to be taken.

‘No, no,’ he cried, as loudly and forcibly as he could, which was neither very loud nor very forcible; only those who have experienced violent exercise up to the neck in water can imagine the extra effect caused by the pressure in rendering respiration quick and laborious.

‘No, no, not by any means, Don Ramon. Stay where you are. We can swim her ashore now, I’m sure; we are drawing nearer sensibly every minute. From where you are, on the top of the baggage, you can command a view all around, while we cannot. We don’t know what dangers we may have to face yet, and if we *must* encounter more, why, I think it’s just as well to have a few minutes’ warning.’

And so it was decided that the ‘Last of the Incas’ should keep his position on the baggage, and look out for anything which might present itself to his view worthy of notice.

It is certain that by his wonderful promptitude in design, together with his activity, boldness, desperate energy, and courage in action, he had saved all their lives.

Shortly it was to be shown that the quiet, somewhat slow-reasoning caution of Andrew Battel was also destined to prove of signal service, and even save the lives of four of the party.

After the sudden squall, which had driven back

their heavily laden little craft, and thus placed their lives in such imminent jeopardy, had passed over, it again fell dead calm.

The sea a slightly undulating glassy plain, the air hot and sultry in the extreme, the almost vertical tropical sun pouring down his blazing rays as though he meant to scorch up the land and dry up the sea.

It very soon dried the wet shirt and canvas trousers of the One-eyed Snake, who was for a time surrounded and enveloped by a cloud of vapour—the steam of the evaporating water.

The process as it went on was delightfully pleasant, for every one knows that rapid evaporation always causes cold, and, exposed without shelter to the blazing rays of the sun, the heat was really something awful.

So much did our Peruvian friend appreciate this, that when the shirt was dried he took it off, dipped it in the water, and again put it on.

All this time they had made excellent progress, and were not more than half a mile from the shore, which they were approaching in a diagonal direction, the current or tide carrying them to the eastward.

Happening to glance his eyes at the placid water astern of the punt, he suddenly started, looked again, crawled as far aft as he could, and again gazed into the sea as though he would fathom it to the bottom with his eyes.

‘By all the saints it is so. Holy Virgin, ancient spirit of the Incas, guardian angel of our race, protect and save my friends!’

‘It is impossible they should all come on board; the punt must be upset or swamped.’

A strange invocation this—to the Virgin in the first place, to a spirit or deity of the ancient religion of the Incas in the second.

The One-eyed Snake was now evidently excited, but with his usual indomitable self-control kept himself calm, and hastened to do the best he could for his comrades, going to work in that quiet, noiseless, and apparently deliberate manner peculiar to him, a manner which sometimes seemed slow, so careful was he as to every detail, but which in reality was both the swiftest and the surest.

Hastily crawling back over the roughly piled-up cargo, he leaned his head and shoulders over the starboard side, so that he looked directly down on his comrades, whose heads and part of shoulders alone were visible.

‘Andrew, where is the ammunition for Big Ben?’

‘Close by my Henry rifle,’ was the reply. ‘It’s in a canvas bag.’

‘The cartridges, shells, and all?’

‘Yes,’ was the hurried reply.

Don Ramon had to lean right over to reach the place where the ammunition was, and in so doing his face and the expression of his features, seen at only about a yard’s distance, forcibly struck the young Englishman.

The strange sneering expression, defiant look, and half-mocking smile were all gone, and in place thereof was an expression of deep concern, almost of terror.

‘Whatever is the matter?’ asked Andrew Battel, with deep interest; ‘something serious, I know.’

‘Nothing, nothing now: only there may be; prepare yourself; nerve yourself.’

‘Have they managed to patch up the boat and launch her in pursuit of us?’ asked Andrew Battel, who now was quite excited, and had left off swimming, in order to devote his whole attention to the words of Don Ramon.

‘No, no; there is no chance of that.’

‘Is there an enemy coming from the shore, then?’

‘No, no; not from the shore.’

‘Not from the shore? From the sea, then? Let us load at once.’

‘Wait a bit; I will give you instant warning, should it be necessary,’ replied Don Ramon; and having got hold of the bag of ammunition, he pulled it up, and at once crawling back to a somewhat more secure position, proceeded to load Big Ben, which lay at hand, the stock all daubed and spattered with the blood and brains of the two slain men.

In loading he was especially careful and deliberate, slow even, for every few seconds, even whilst engaged on this important task, he would raise his eyes and anxiously scan the surface of the sea.

Scarcely had he finished when, after a close survey all around, he suddenly put down the big gun, and again crawled over close to Andrew Battel.

‘Where are the knives stored, those long Mexican knives, of which we have half a dozen? I must get at them at once, even if I throw some of the baggage overboard.’

‘Why, what’s the matter? Knives! Are we to fight in the water?’

‘Tell me where they are; don’t lose another

minute in idle questioning, as you value your life and the lives of others.'

'The knives are under the two bolts of canvas aft, on the port side; they are wrapped up in soft leather.'

'Right!' was the laconic reply; and the One-eyed Snake vanished from the sight of Andrew Battel, who, what with the excitement, and one thing and another, was really quite bewildered.

In a very short time the energetic Peruvian again looked over, and handed a knife to each of the five who were in the water, giving Andrew Battel his last.

'What on earth are we to do with these? Are we likely to be attacked by amphibious savages in the water?'

'No, no! if you can't guess, don't seek to know—perhaps it will be best. I will give you due warning. Prepare yourself for desperate danger. Screw your nerves up. Courage and coolness—that will carry us through.'

Suddenly a thought flashed through Andrew Battel's mind.

'Ah' he cried, with dilated eyes and horrified voice; 'I know now. Sharks—you have seen a shark!'

'No, not yet—at least, I am not certain. But I have seen that which is next to it—pilot-fish following the punt.'

Andrew Battel, perhaps more suddenly than was prudent, turned his face towards the others, who, having got their long-bladed sharp weapons, were wondering for what purport they were to use them.

'Look out, lads,' he said; 'look out for danger,

and keep your hearts up. We are likely to be attacked by sharks.'

At this the negro gave a wild shriek of terror and let go his hold, and would probably have sunk, so great was his terror, had not Peter Carder saved him. The unfortunate black had years before escaped barely from the jaws of death and a big shark, the tiger of the deep absolutely lacerating his thigh before he could be hauled into the boat from which he had been rashly bathing.

Sharks! Horrible word! horrible thought!

All knew that it was impossible for them to clamber on board the punt.

Laden as she was, the result of the attempt would probably be her swamping, and then all would be lost.

Sharks! They saw before them the dreadful prospect of contending for dear life against these monsters of the deep in their own element.

'May the Lord have mercy on our souls!' said Andrew Battel.

'Amen!' said Peter Carder solemnly.

CHAPTER X.

THE SNAKE PREPARES TO ENCOUNTER THE FOE— THE NEGRO'S TERROR.

IF the dreadful suspicions which the One-eyed Snake entertained were well founded, the lives of all of them depended in a great measure upon him; for the other five, immersed in the water, could get but a very limited view.

Ya Roni Sarka had seen the pilot-fish—several of them—swimming astern. He well knew that these little fishes invariably attended the monster shark; for what reason has never been explained, and probably never will be; though some say it is for the same reason that the jackal follows the lion—to feed on the leavings and garbage of the more powerful beast of prey.

Of this, however, there is not an atom of truth, so it may be put down as purely guess-work.

Not only, moreover, had our Peruvian friend's keen eye discerned the pilot-fish, but looking across the sea towards the stranded vessel, his attention was attracted to something moving on the surface of the water.

It was small, at a considerable distance, and, moreover, was directly in the glare of the sun's rays, so he was unable to say for any certainty what it was.

But its appearance was such that it *might be* the dorsal fin of a shark, and as he had already seen the pilot-fish, there was too much reason to fear that such was the fact.

As auxiliaries to Big Ben, which, when once fired, took some time in reloading, he had had repeating-rifles laid quite handy.

On these, however, there was no certain dependence to be placed, for a shark has been known to receive as many as twenty bullets before succumbing.

Scarcely had he fully completed his arrangements and placed everything in order, not forgetting a long boarding-pike, which he thought might prove useful, than his worst fears were realised.

Looking astern, he distinctly saw, moving

slowly in an oblique direction towards the punt, a thin dark object, like the half of a large long dish cut longitudinally.

Well he knew what it was—the dorsal fin of a shark.

And of a big shark, too—there could be no mistake about that.

And presently he descried, sailing slowly on beside the first one, another fin.

‘Two big sharks,’ he said to himself, and then looked over the stern of the punt for the pilot-fish.

They were no longer there.

They had gone—gone to join the sea-monsters, their masters, and lead them to the fray.

First the two sharks sailed along, their back fins always out of the water on the port side of the punt, at a distance of about fifty yards.

Don Ramon felt inclined to risk a shot with Big Ben, but determined to wait till they were at closer quarters, well knowing the difficulty of hitting any object when under water.

Meanwhile, it need scarcely be said that the most desperate exertions were being used to urge the craft towards the shore.

In ten minutes or a quarter of an hour more they might fairly hope to beach her, and then they would once more be out of danger—for the time, at least; though, of course, it was impossible to say, having escaped the perils of the sea, what dangers might await them on land.

The sharks now seemed to have decided on business. They dropped slowly back, and, at the same time slowly sidling up to the punt, were soon right astern.

From his elevated position on the baggage our friend could command a clear view of both the monsters—their fierce round eyes, great jaws, dark-grayish backs, and white bellies.

They were not more than twenty yards distant, and Don Ramon determined to give one of them a shot.

Accordingly, aiming steadily at the nearest, he let drive.

At first he thought he had hit the brute, for the shot struck the water a few feet from its head.

The shark made a sudden dash, half-leaping out of the water at the same time, and then, at a great pace, shot ahead, followed by the other one.

They passed within fifteen yards of the five in the water, whose feelings may be imagined, scarcely described.

The unhappy negro was crying and muttering with terror,

‘O Lord! O Lord! send them sharks away, an’ go to meetin’ reg’lar ever arter! I’ll repent, O Lord! I’ll be a chosen vessel ob grace; I’ll preach the gospel twice ob a Sunday and once ob a week-day; I’ll get up prayer meetin’s aboard on craft I ships aboard—only send dem big fish away! O, do, dear Lord!’

The poor wretch was completely unnerved by terror, and could do little or nothing towards urging on the progress of the punt.

Andrew Battel, Peter Carder, and the Copper Dutchman were also, all of them, fully aware of their terrible danger. All were pale, but determined and ready to make a hard fight to escape.

‘Here they come!’ said Peter Carder, in a voice low, but loud enough to be heard by all.

And surely enough the two dorsal fins of the sharks could be seen coming straight towards them, at a distance of, perhaps, twenty-five yards.

The monsters seemed to have resolved to seize on their prey at once.

So soon as the darkie heard Peter Carder's words, and saw the sharks approaching, he gave vent to a wild yell of terror, and, letting go his hold of the punt, started swimming in a mad blundering manner for the shore.

Almost at the same moment the Peruvian fired at the foremost shark.

Again he missed. For though the piece was steadily aimed, and the projectile flew straight enough through the air, it glanced on one side on striking the water, and finally ricocheting, went skipping along the surface for a distance of half a mile.

He resolved, after those two shots, that he must wait till the sharks were quite at close quarters, and down beneath him, so that he would not have to fire at the water at so acute an angle.

The effect of the shot, however, was to startle the sharks, which instantly rushed off as before, making the water foam with the lashing of their powerful tails.

They swerved towards the shore in the same direction in which the terror-stricken nigger was swimming.

They paused ; then, after a few moments, went rapidly in pursuit of the black, notwithstanding that it is said they will never touch a darkie when there is a white man to be had.

CHAPTER XI.

DEATH OF THE NEGRO—DON RAMON AND THE SHARKS.

DON RAMON, who saw and appreciated the poor fellow's danger, shouted to him :

‘Swim ! swim for your life ! Get your knife ready ! Dive, if you can ! When they turn on their backs to lay hold of you, then gash them in the belly !’

But, alas ! the poor fool had let fall his long knife, which might have given him a chance.

The shout of Don Ramon caused him to look back, and with another yell of horror he commenced the most desperate but ill-requited efforts. Instead of swimming in the water, and gliding along as swiftly and noiselessly as possible, he made a prodigious splashing, which not only retarded his speed, but was bound to attract the attention of the sharks, even if they had not before seen him.

Don Ramon gave a slight cry.

‘Look ! look ! It is all over with him now, poor wretch ! Swim ! swim for your lives ! urge the punt along—we cannot aid him ! It will, at all events, occupy them some minutes tearing his body to pieces.’

Scarcely had he spoken when a wild yell of agony and mortal terror was heard.

There was seen a great commotion and foaming and splashing of the water, where the negro was ; then he disappeared, but the agitation of the water continued as the monsters tore him limb from limb.

Then the green sea all about the fatal spot

was deeply tinged with blood, and they knew that it was all over with the unhappy negro.

‘Swim, lads, swim! It will give us time, and when they follow—for follow they will, having tasted blood—I will keep them at bay with the rifle and Big Ben.’

Easier said than done. Before five minutes had elapsed the sea-monsters had finished the last morsel they cared about of the unhappy negro’s dismembered body, and now sailed on quietly but swiftly in pursuit of the punt.

The dreadful end of their unfortunate companion, wrought before their very eyes, could not but instil the four survivors who were in the water with a deadly horror.

Nevertheless, none of them lost nerve—even the Irishman, who, apart from his supernatural terror of a ‘rain’ of corpses, was a brave man, keeping his pluck up, and doing his best to aid the other three in pulling their craft towards shore, which then seemed to their eager gaze, occasionally turned that way, tantalisingly near.

Another ten minutes, or quarter of an hour at the outside, and they would be on *terra firma*, and be able to laugh at all the sharks in the ocean.

Ten minutes!

Ah! but what horrors might be enacted in that ten minutes!

Even at that moment the two huge monsters were sailing up to them at a good pace, but still in a quiet leisurely manner, as though sure of their prey.

Don Ramon, ever vigilant and on the alert, had carefully reloaded Big Ben, and had got up another Henry repeating-rifle and plenty of am-

munition; so that he had now, close to his hand, three revolver-rifles, with all the chambers loaded, and the big gun charged with a shell.

The moment he thought the sharks were within reasonable distance, he commenced firing, using one rifle only, taking good aim, discharging all the six barrels, and then reloading again as fast as possible; thus keeping two always loaded to be used, to help his friends, should the monsters come to close quarters.

The effect of his fire was not decisive; the sharks seemed astounded and startled at the rapid 'plash, plash' of the bullets in the water close to them; they would suddenly make a dart to right or left, but—ominous fact!—they steadily approached.

While they were at a considerable distance, Don Ramon's fire could scarcely be of any avail, by reason of its glancing nature. But as they approached, and he began to be able to see their huge ugly bodies, then it was a different matter.

He had fired about eighteen shots without any visible effect beyond the darting to the right and left already mentioned, when suddenly, on again firing, one of the great sea tigers leaped clean out of the water, coming down again with a great splash, and then proceeding to lash the water into foam with his powerful tail.

'A hit! a hit! by the great god of the Incas, a hit!' he cried exultingly.

Then to his comrades: 'Keep your hearts up, boys; I lodged a bullet in one just now. It may prove a mortal wound; anyhow, it will have the effect of scaring the brute away.'

This was welcome news to our friends, whose

well-nigh exhausted strength and nervous energy was in sore need of something inspiriting after the desperate ordeal they had already passed through.

It, however, turned out that the shark was not only not killed, but also that the bullet wound, notwithstanding the pain and fury it put it to, was insufficient to cause the pursuit of the coveted prey to be given up.

It is well known that sharks will attack a naked man in the water rather than one with canvas trousers and shirt on.

Also that they will take for choice men swimming with bare feet to those with stockings on.

Now all our friends' feet were bare, and no doubt these tempting-looking morsels—white flesh—greatly tempted the sharky appetite.

It was with a good deal of consternation that Don Ramon saw the shark he had wounded again place itself alongside the other and come steadily on, as though it had not got such a thing as a bullet in its body.

He immediately commenced firing again, rapidly taking up a second rifle when the barrels of the first were emptied.

The tenth shot caused the shark—the one before wounded—again to make a sudden plunge in the water.

‘Hit him again!’ shouted Don Ramon; and, in order to encourage his friends, ‘Go ahead, boys! we’ll be ashore and out of danger in a few minutes more.’

The four in the water, thus inspirited, redoubled their exertions; and almost immediately there came another and most welcome shout from their comrade on the punt.

‘He’s gone, he’s skedaddled, he’s nowhere to be seen! There’s only one now, lads, and I’ll soon give him a pill or two.’

Despite all their exertions, however, they seemed to approach the shore very, very slowly, and already fatigue was beginning to tell on all of them, especially the Irishman, who was fleshy, and not by any means in good condition. Aching arms and shoulders, gasping, difficult breathing, told the tale that this violent exertion must soon slacken.

Don Ramon now turned his attention to the remaining shark, firing rapidly and with precision.

Soon another joyful shout proclaimed that he had been again successful, and had hit the second monster.

This one, like its fellow, when wounded, gave a great leap and plunge, and then dropped astern.

But also, like its fellow, it quickly began to creep up again, lashing the water angrily with its powerful tail.

Again did Don Ramon, after eight misses, lodge a bullet in the brute’s huge carcase. Again a plunge, and a lashing of the water into foam.

Then, after a bit, all this commotion ceased, and shark number two also disappeared from view.

‘Hurrah, boys,’ cried Don Ramon, ‘they’ve both made tracks, both had enough of it! That last shot of mine was more than the brute could stand. You can ease yourselves a bit now, I reckon. I’ll keep a sharp look-out, in case they should turn up again.’

This was glad news for the four in the water, and it was with sighs of relief, both mental and bodily, that they all relaxed the violent efforts they had been making.

Meanwhile the punt slowly approached the shore, and Don Ramon employed himself in reloading all the firearms, keeping up, meanwhile, a bright look-out.

But the sharks did not appear again on the surface.

Don Ramon had loaded all the rifles, and was in the act of inserting the cartridge with shell attached in Big Ben, when, casting his glance, he saw that which almost froze the blood in his veins.

The water was calm and clear, and he could penetrate it with his keen eye to a considerable depth.

‘Look out, lads,’ he cried, in a husky voice, ‘look! God help and have mercy on you all!’

Then he started to his feet, and hastily put Big Ben on full cock.

What was it he saw?

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT DON RAMON SAW IN THE SEA—VICTORY.

WHAT was there to be seen in the green depth of the ocean to produce such an effect on the calm and unexcitable Peruvian?

A gray mass, some fourteen or fifteen feet down, oval in shape, and about seven feet in length, occasionally exhibiting flashes of white.

The gray back and white belly of one of the ravenous sharks!

The monster, twice wounded by Don Ramon, had grown cunning, and dived to avoid the sting:

ing bullets, and attack his prey at better advantage.

At first he only saw one, but even as he gazed the other brute appeared upon the scene.

They were distant from the punt only some three or four yards, and by one movement of their tails could easily place themselves beneath the unfortunates in the water.

‘Look out, lads, look out!’ screamed Don Ramon, in terrible excitement, knowing, as he well did, the frightful tribe. ‘The sharks are beneath you; ready with your knives! I will do my best, and the issue must be left to the great God, in whose hands we all live; but dive, if possible, when you see their white bellies turning up.’

Immediately after giving utterance to these few warning words, Don Ramon threw himself on his chest for the sake of steadiness, and, with Big Ben in hand, eagerly watched an opportunity.

The terrible piece of ordnance was this time loaded with shell, and the Peruvian lay like a cat watching a mouse, eagerly looking out for a chance.

Through the clear calm sea the two sharks were perfectly distinguishable at the depth of some fifteen feet, moving about in a purposeless sort of way, describing a sort of semicircle about the starboard side of the punt, where were our four adventurers.

For some time they kept at a distance of several yards; but presently the keen-eyed watcher saw one float slowly towards the surface in a diagonal direction, thus approaching his prey at the same time.

One second—two seconds—three seconds, Don

Ramon waited, as calm, pale, and motionless as an image of marble.

Then the sea monster slowly and deliberately rolled himself half over, and displayed his white belly to the keen and watchful eye of the One-eyed Snake.

The distance was about two yards horizontally, and perhaps about eight feet in depth. The chance was not allowed to go by: the next moment the belching roar of Big Ben was heard, and a shell projectile went hurtling and hissing into the sea.

The effect could not be seen immediately, for the shark, plunging his whole body convulsively, made it impossible for anything to be seen decisively.

In a second or two, however, there bubbled up with considerable force a quantity of air and white smoke, and then Don Ramon knew the shell had hit the shark, and exploded.

As to the full result of the shot it was impossible to say as yet; but in less than a quarter of a minute there came proof of absolute success as far as this sea monster was concerned, for about twenty yards from the punt was slowly upheaved to the surface the huge body of the carnivorous fish.

Belly uppermost, and with a great chasm therein, due to the explosion of a well-aimed shell.

Shark number one was dead, and finally disposed of.

Victory was half gained.

But there was the other.

And this one was not only ferocious and voracious, but also, to judge by his actions, a most cunning animal. It really seemed, in this case, that

mere instinct was not applicable, but that absolutely reason dictated its course of action.

The brute slowly sank lower, at the same time allowing himself to drift slowly away from the punt, so that in time Don Ramon lost sight of this cunning foe entirely.

It was now that he felt his own utter helplessness, and the awful position of his comrades.

The shark was down beneath them somewhere; it might at any moment dart up suddenly, seize its victim, and drag him down to the depths, and there tear him to pieces at leisure.

He had no means of knowing from what direction the shark would come to seize his prey, and standing with a formidable gun loaded in his hand, he could almost have wept that he was as helpless as a child.

Suddenly he heard a cry,

‘Och! be jabbers, I’m touching somethin’ wid me feet!’

Don Ramon’s heart stood still, and the next moment he expected to hear the unfortunate fellow’s death-yell.

‘Get your knife ready,’ he cried, and hastily crawled over the baggage to the spot where the Irishman held on to the punt, so as to be ready, at least, to give the shark a shot when it should rise or attempt to seize the unfortunate man’s leg.

‘Divil a shark at all, yer lordship.’ The Irishman, hearing him called Don Ramon, found it incumbent on him to give his translation of the title.

‘Divil a shark at all, but just sand, solid sand, I felt wid my bare feet.’

‘And so do I,’ cried Peter Carder; ‘I too feel ground. Hurrah! we’re on a sandbank.’

This proved to be a fact.

The Irishman, being farthest forward, had felt it first.

The water shoaled rapidly.

In a quarter of a minute all were on their feet, and in a very little more time they were dragging their punt along, themselves scarcely waist-deep.

It was now, as they were retiring, that the shark, seeming to know that his prey was escaping from him, made a savage and determined rush.

Andrew Battel was knocked over, the brute's shiny body absolutely grazing him. He made one stab with his knife, but striking the shark on the back, where the skin is thick, almost impervious to a knife, produced no effect.

The shark rushed on, and when in the midst of our friends turned on its back to grip one of them in its dreadful jaws; but by good fortune, or kind Providence, the water was here very shallow, under a fathom, and the shark was unable to execute this manœuvre properly.

He did certainly manage to roll over, and made a savage grip at Peter Carder, who, however, by reason of his great height, was not much over his knees in water, and was able easily to avoid it.

Not only to avoid it, but to repay the attempt with interest.

Up went his long right arm, his hand holding his knife, and the next instant there was a great gash in the white belly of the shark.

Don Ramon also put in a shot at this moment; and the others closing around the discomfited monster, struck with their knives, with the strength and fierceness engendered by hate, loathing, and the knowledge of the danger from which they had

escaped. The shark struggled and plunged violently, lashing the sea into froth and bloody foam.

Several times one or other of them was knocked down by blows from its powerful tail; but for all deadly purposes the brute was helpless, and in a very short time floated a bleeding carcase on the surface of the sea.

CHAPTER XIII.

LAND AT LAST—THE PERUVIAN'S ENTHUSIASM.

'FORTUNE favours the brave' is an old saying, and one which is often proved true.

It was now late in the afternoon, the sun being about three hours high.

Our friends had since morning been constantly exposed to peril, constantly compelled to fight and work with might and main for dear life.

Danger after danger had been surmounted by means of stout arms and brave hearts, and now, having escaped from the fury of bad men, they had finally also been successful in defeating and destroying the great tigers of the deep, the sharks.

The highest point of the sandbank was within a foot of the surface of the sea, so that our friends, having hauled the punt up close, were able, standing on firm sand, only half-way up to their knees in water, to make arrangements for embarking on board the punt.

Everything seemed now in their favour; a light sea breeze had sprung up, blowing direct on the shore. They could see that there was a sand-

bank on which the little waves gently rippled, and knew that their landing would now be an easy matter. There was but one thing to spoil their complete satisfaction, and cast a gloom over the spirits of all; and this was the thought and memory of the dreadful fate of the unhappy negro cook—a fate, however, for which they could in no wise reproach themselves, for it was brought about entirely by his own cowardice and folly.

The punt being securely moored stem and stern by the side of the sandbank, they now proceeded to alter the arrangements of the baggage, so as to make room for them all to get on board. Also a mast and sail were rigged to take advantage of the favourable breeze.

In about an hour after the time when they first struck the sandbank, all were on board, the sail spread to the breeze, and the craft having been cast loose, sailed stoutly away for the shore, the mainland of the great South American continent.

As the punt grounded on the beach of this their land of promise, all leaped into the water, and, dragging the craft nearly high and dry, at the suggestion of Don Ramon, gave expression to their satisfaction at escape from past dangers, and the fact of being actually on the soil of the country where they expected to realise unbounded wealth, by a ringing cheer.

‘Hurrah for South America! hurrah for the golden land! Cheers, comrades, for the successful issue of this the first part of our expedition! We stand on South American soil; ere many months have passed we shall encamp in the ancient empire of Peru, and again ere many more months we shall have penetrated to the golden land, the land of the

Incas, land of boundless wealth, and I shall once more ascend my ancestral throne!

‘Cheers, then, for past successes, and cheers, too, for those yet to come—for succeed we must and will.’

The Peruvian spoke with genuine enthusiasm, and his confidence in ultimate success seemed to be shared by his comrades; for, at his suggestion, hearty cheers rang out, and it was with comparatively light hearts our friends set about the task of lightening the punt, taking the baggage ashore, and hauling her high and dry.

The baggage and stores were all landed and carefully stored, forming a sort of camp on the beach, about a couple of hundred yards only from the sea; and by sundown our five friends had made comfortable for the night.

At a few yards’ distance only from the camp was plenty of dry wood, and very shortly there was a good fire and every comfort.

After a quiet pipe round the watch-fire of their encampment, our friends, tired out after the exertions and perils of the day, rolled themselves up in their blankets, and, with feet to the fire, the night being fine and warm, without troubling to set up tent or shelter of any kind, slept the sleep of the weary.

Shortly after sunrise in the morning all were awake.

The punt, which had already done them much good service afloat, was quickly mounted on wheels, and their baggage and other goods carefully stowed, each one of them carrying himself a burden of thirty pounds.

Two hours before noon, everything being in

readiness, a start was made from the sea-shore through the brushwood up the slope, and into the slowly increasing forest.

It was the intention of our adventurers to penetrate into the interior that day as far as the summit of the low range, which seemed to run parallel with the shore.

Having gained the summit of this high and fertile hill, Don Ramon, to whom was left the organisation of the plan of advance, reckoned that they would at once be able to ascertain their present exact position of latitude and longitude by means of their instruments, and also decide upon a course into the interior, by pursuing which they might strike the great river Orinoco.

In dragging along the punt-wagon four of them put themselves to the shaft, whilst Don Ramon, going in front, selected the best road through the brush, and also with a sharp cutlass and small axe cut away such obstacles of scrub and small bushes as stood in the way.

By noon they had with little trouble penetrated through the belt of low brush, cactus plants, and high grass, and had gained the limits of the forest, which commenced about half-way up the hill.

Here, during the blazing heat of the day, a halt was made of three hours, under shelter of a grove of great trees.

The scene was a grand and even solemn one.

Wild groves were abundant; patches between the forest groves were covered with creeping plants of all the most vivid shades of green. A few scarlet passion-flowers were here and there to be seen, and the road upwards was everywhere entangled with a mass of scrubby and bushy plants,

amongst which the prickly mimosa was most conspicuous.

The fruit was not continuous when seen at close quarters; it lay in groves and patches. The groves of cassia-trees, although low in stature, were especially conspicuous, with their handsome foliage and yellow flowers. Bright-hued butterflies, birds, and insects swarmed in the trees, and, strange to say, all were voiceless; the grasses and creeping plants were abundant, the foliage luxuriant, the heat intense, the silence profound.

There was no sound to be heard of either bird, insect, or beast.

CHAPTER XIV.

OUT ON THE PLAINS—PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

THE blazing heat of the midday sun, sheltered even as they were amidst a grove of mimosa-trees, and the fatigue of dragging a heavy load uphill, were sufficient to make the midday siesta most grateful and welcome.

It was about three hours after noon when our adventurers renewed their progress, Don Ramon still leading the way, and steering his road through the forest.

The ascent grew somewhat steeper as they proceeded, the ground was hard and smooth, and the wheels of the punt-wagon ran easily, and they were able to make progress at the rate of nearly two miles an hour.

An hour before sundown, the summit of a low chain of hills was successfully reached, and a view

obtained of a vast plain, extending as far as the eye could reach to the south-west and south-east.

Having selected a high spot, which commanded a view all round, the camp was again pitched, and a council held as to what should be their course and progress.

By consulting their charts, and also by observation already made with sextant and quadrant, our adventurers found that they had landed some sixty miles from the mouth of the Orinoco river.

Don Ramon proposed they should march some hundred miles across the plain spread before them, so as to strike the river higher up than its mouth.

Having gained the banks of the great stream somewhere near the Indian town of Angostura, it was proposed carefully to laden the punt, and by means of sail, oars, and towing-line, to make their way up the river, and thus penetrate into the far interior, where the Rio Negro joins the mighty Amazon.

This night, having pitched the camp, a tent or rather awning was rigged. The climate was so beautiful that nothing was required but cover from the falling dew.

The camp-fire was lighted, the evening meal of dried meat, biscuit, and coffee partaken of with enjoyment, then day faded into the short twilight of the tropics. Our four friends started their pipes, and gathering round the camp-fire, had a short discussion as to their future plan of action—the Irishman, not understanding the subject, alone not joining therein.

Said Peter Carder, lighting his pipe, ‘Seems to me, comrades, that the sooner we strike the big river the better; its toughish work dragging our

wagon over hard ground; and if we come to swamps and mud, it would be most tremendous work to get it along.'

'There's little fear of that!' replied Don Ramon. 'You may reckon, if we proceed as I propose, we shall have a march of a hundred miles across a dry plain, where there is no water whatever to be found.'

'Speaking of water,' put in Andrew Battel, 'what shall we do for drinking purposes? We have only a ten-gallon keg.'

'What shall we do?' replied the Peruvian promptly; 'make use of it economically and carefully; in six days' march across yon level plain, at the outside, we ought to strike the Orinoco, and, till we do so, we must make what water we have suffice.'

'Likely to be shortish allowance, won't there?' asked Peter Carder.

'Very likely,' replied Don Ramon calmly; 'the sooner we get accustomed to privations of that kind the better, for we may expect many before we accomplish our object.'

'Are there civilised settlements anywhere on the plains?' asked Andrew Battel.

'I should say so, undoubtedly, as we get nearer the river-bank, where, as every one knows, the soil is most fertile.'

'What about the plain we've got to traverse?' asked Peter Carder; 'is it inhabited by men or beasts, or is it utterly lonely and desolate?'

'We are very likely to come across some Indian tribes,' said Don Ramon, who appeared thoroughly up on the subject; 'and there is undoubtedly plenty of wild cattle.'

‘Yes, in case we could kill a good fat cow or bull it’d be kind of pleasant,’ said Peter Carder. ‘I’m pretty well tired of salt junk and pork aboard that cursed brig, I can tell you, and don’t like our own dried meat and pemmican much better.’

‘There is little doubt,’ replied Don Ramon, ‘we shall be able to kill what we want, for it is a peculiarity of the wild cattle all over South America that, through what seems their curiosity, they will stand still staring, and allow a man to approach within fifty or sixty yards.’

‘What about the Indians?’ asked Andrew Battel; ‘any chance of a brush with them?’

‘I should think not,’ was the reply, ‘unless there should happen to be roving about the plain, either on a hunting or other expedition, one of the mounted tribes which come from a region farther to the south and west; anyhow, if attacked, armed as we are, we shall be able to give a good account of them. On that subject I have no fear.’

The Irishman, who had remained silent for a long time, now all at once asked a question.

‘Ah! now,’ he said, ‘you’ve been talking of beef, shure is there a chance of any praties? I’d give a night’s sleep and two days’ bacca for a rale good feed of praties.’

‘No, Darby,’ said Andrew Battel, ‘not a chance; you’ll have to wait till you get back again to a white man’s land, owner of great wealth, before you can hope to taste a “pratie” again.’

‘Ah, well!’ said Darby Kelly, with a resigned sigh, as he filled his pipe, ‘shure we must take it as it comes in this world, the rough and smooth together.’

‘That’s a fact,’ put in Peter Carder; ‘and

from what I've seen, it do seem to me that we're likely to have more of the rough than the smooth. Rome warn't built in a day, and a diamond as big as a swan's egg ain't to be got without a little trouble—I wish it was.'

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE ROAD.

'WELL, then,' said Don Ramon, changing the conversation, 'shall we decide the start to-morrow, moving at early dawn, and strike right across the plain for the banks of the Orinoco?'

The conduct of the expedition was, by mutual consent, almost tacitly resigned to Don Ramon, matters of detail only forming subject of discussion.

For not only was he well acquainted with South American travel of all sorts and descriptions, but he had given conclusive proof of his energy, endurance, undoubted courage, and fertility of resource.

So, after a brief talk, amounting more to gossip and speculation than anything else, it was decided that at early dawn on the following morning they should strike the camp, load their wagon, and start on their long, long journey into the interior of South America.

This night a watch was set, each of them taking two hours—not that there was any apparent danger, but as a matter of safety and precaution.

At early dawn of a splendid tropical morning,

all were awake and astir. Samson Von Burr, who kept the last two hours' look-out, had lighted the fire and chopped some wood from the forest to make a cheerful blaze; for though they were only a few degrees south of the line, the mornings and evenings were cold.

The coffee was soon ready, and drank with much zest, and then, after just ten minutes' spell for a pipe, all set to work to strike the camp and load.

This was only a matter of half an hour, and the early part of the journey being all down hill, they were able to get down to the plain and traverse a distance of fully ten miles by an hour before noon.

At this point they again halted, and taking advantage of a small group of low but thickly foliated cassia trees, made themselves comfortable for a three-hours' *siesta* during the extreme heat of the day.

For the last hour the travelling had been very difficult. They had passed from the region of forest, where the undergrowth was comparatively scanty, to the plain, where all sorts of creepers, plants, and bushes grew in the greatest luxuriance.

Don Ramon, provided with an axe and sharp cutlass, marched in front as pioneer, and found abundant work in cutting away the more impenetrable of these; but still the progress of the punt-wagon was a matter of great labour, for the ground, though hard, was very rugged.

After the scorching hours of mid-day were passed, progress was again resumed, and by an hour of sun-down, they calculated that they had gone over fully seventeen miles of ground, and

resolved to keep on until they had cleared twenty, at which rate, in five days, they might fairly calculate to strike the river Orinoco.

While on the seaward slope of the low range of hills they had crossed, there had been little sign of animal, bird, or insect life; but now, however, as they penetrated into the wide-spreading *pampas*, they found life constantly increasing.

They passed, during the course of the day, scores and scores of beautiful butterflies, red, orange, blue, black, striped with green, and other magnificent specimens; there were huge dragon flies with orange bodies, flying with a humming noise, and many other winged insects, which none but Don Ramon had ever seen before.

Reptiles, too, frequently crossed their paths—especially a species of lizard, about a foot and a quarter long, of a pale sea-green colour, with red spots. This creature Don Ramon declared to be deadly poisonous, but excellent eating. The head was like that of a tortoise, the eyes very large and staring, having a most disagreeable and repulsive appearance.

During the noonday rest, Don Ramon gave them much information concerning animals, birds, reptiles, and insects. Of this particular lizard he promised them one for supper, relying, we may presume, on his reptile-charming powers.

He advised them to put on their big boots, as, from indications he observed, he thought they would reach a stream or streams of water before they came to the big river.

In this case they would certainly come across numbers of animals, birds, insects, and reptiles.

Arriving at the summit of a gentle eminence

they pitched camp for the night, just after sundown, and having grown quick and skilful in their arrangements, some hastened to pitch the tent, and the others proceeded to unload what was necessary, cut wood, and light the camp-fire.

Don Ramon, for the time, disappeared, having gone out alone into the bush.

Just as it was getting dusk he returned, carrying by the tail a large specimen of the lizard before spoken of.

In a very short space this was skinned, cleaned, and hung up in the midst of the scorching flames—it was the proper way, he explained, of cooking this reptile.

Notwithstanding some qualms and misgivings, which were, however, got over by the savoury odour of the scorched roast meat—Andrew Battel, who was most fastidious, enjoyed his supper, and was even willing to own that the great green lizard, ugly and repulsive as it was in appearance, was capital eating.

Supper over, all lighted their pipes and drew round the genial fire, whilst Don Ramon proceeded to amuse and interest them with short sketches of the strange animals, birds, and reptiles they might expect to meet with.

First, he had a few words to say about the lizard with which they had just regaled themselves.

‘The tail, as you have seen, is of a darker green than the rest of the body,’ Don Ramon explained, ‘and marked by several white rings; the greater the number of them the older, and consequently the more poisonous is the reptile. Its teeth are sharp enough to make a mark even on steel. Although it seems a slow and lazy animal, it is not

easy to catch, for when pursued it glides away amongst the brush, continually turning and twisting. It has a constant cry, something resembling the cuckoo, only sharper and more shrill, after which it emits a hissing noise; it has a sting in the tail, which is of so desperately venomous a nature that the poison invariably proves mortal, unless immediately burned with a hot iron or cut with a knife.

‘The blood is not red, but of a pale yellowish colour; further in the interior, where it grows to a greater size, it is even more poisonous. Some of the Indians dip their arrows in the blood of this creature, a wound from which is then certain death.

‘Moreover, a most terrible and venomous poison is procured in the following strange manner.

‘The reptile is caught alive, its feet cut off, and then hung up by the tail. Being thus tortured and exasperated it emits a thick yellowish fluid from its mouth, which is caught in vessels set beneath. This viscid, treacly fluid is dried into cakes in the sun, so as to be easily carried about; when wanted for use it only requires moistening or dissolving in a little water, and is unquestionably the most deadly poison in the world.

‘Wherever it touches the skin, even if there be no wound, it immediately raises a blister; the flesh then turns black, and gangrenes.

‘The only possible chance is immediate amputation of the limb.’

‘May I be rammed and jammed,’ said Peter Carder, ‘Mr. Inca, if this isn’t a nice creature you’ve been giving us a supper off! Ain’t there any danger of its poisoning us?’

‘Not a bit of it. As far as eating goes, it’s as

harmless and wholesome as roast lamb, which, by the bye, is a dish you need not expect to taste for many a long month.'

They chatted around the camp-fire for another half-hour, and then all except the one on watch rolled themselves in their blankets and fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVI.

A STRANGE PHENOMENON.

IT was the watch or look-out of Peter Carder late during the night, that is to say, between two and four in the morning.

At the latter hour the gray dawn began to show out in the east, and the Yankee, not feeling inclined to sleep again, lit his pipe, and sauntering about, proceeded to gather sticks and twigs to light the fire, although it was not yet daylight.

By the time, however, he had made a little pile of brush and other wood a dim gray light revealed to him the flat expanse of plain which spread on every side.

He was just about to strike a light, and had got his flint, steel, and tinder-box in readiness, when, happening to cast his eyes to the north-east, he fancied he could make out something in motion.

He looked hard, shading his eyes with his hand, and felt almost certain he saw something, like a long dark ribbon trailing itself slowly across the plain.

He even fancied he could make out the direc-

tion in which it was moving—towards the very little hillock or cumulus on which they had camped.

He resolved to wait a short time, as the light was momentarily increasing, and meanwhile forbore to light the fire as a matter of prudence.

After pacing up and down on a short level slope for some five minutes he grew impatient, and though it was still a long way from daylight, he went up to the highest point to reconnoitre.

There was more light now, but yet he could not clearly make out what the dark moving spot was. Mist and fog rolled about the plain, and presently whatever it was disappeared from view.

Peter Carder thought it too early as yet to awaken his comrades, so, descending the little hill, walked slowly out into the wild prairie grass and scrub. At places it was as high as his shoulders, but at an average was a little over waist-high.

Still, however, the occurrences of tall patches and tufts of tall growth presented an extended view.

Peter Carder had brought with him a tomahawk or small hatchet, and a small coil of light rope; for he intended to cut some logs and branches of dry dead wood, not only to make a good blaze on this particular morning, but to take with them for the evening fire. For the One-eyed Snake, who was well qualified to judge, gave it as his opinion that they would not come across any wood suitable for fuel on the next day's march.

Accordingly, Peter Carder sauntered slowly on

in the gray dawn, striding easily over the great fissures and gaps in the now parched soil, and encircling the clumps and patches which, by their too great denseness, barred his path.

As he proceeded, he cut here a dead branch, there a bundle of smaller wood, leaving them to gather up on his return.

Scarcely noticing it, he prolonged his excursion into the vast and lonely *pampas*, until he had gone fully a mile from the camping place.

His great length of stride often caused him to cover more ground than he had thought of.

When calculating he had cut quite as much wood as he could conveniently collect and carry on his journey back, he stopped and looked behind him.

The *pampas*, or prairie plain, *looked*, from any little elevation, perfectly flat and level of surface.

But this was not so in fact, for there were divers inequalities and undulations all over its wide expanse.

Peter Carder, on looking back, was quite unable to make out where the camp lay, although it was pitched on a mound. This was by reason of some of these undulations, also the frequent patches of very tall grass.

However, this fact did not discomfort him, for, warned by both Samson Von Burr and Don Ramon, both old travellers across South American wilds, each had provided himself with a pocket compass, always to be carried about.

By means of this little instrument, our Yankee quickly discovered the right direction, and shouldering the last branch he had cut down, he was

about starting on his way back, when suddenly he stopped still and listened.

He heard something.

What was it?

A distant sound—low, hollow, and of a rumbling bellowing character.

He looked towards where he knew the camp lay, and listened intently.

No, it did not proceed thence.

Turning his back he looked in an exactly opposite direction, and came to the conclusion that the sounds came across the plains from that direction.

But what was it? What could it be? What did it most resemble?

These were the questions which occurred to him as he stood listening in puzzled bewilderment.

Of one thing he felt certain. It was approaching, the sounds were growing perceptibly nearer.

Not an idea of the real cause of this strange noise occurred to our Yankee friend, for though shrewd enough in some things, he was in others a slow thinker.

CHAPTER XVII.

PETER CARDER'S ADVENTURE.

THERE stood at a little distance from him a large cactus plant, or rather small tree, such great proportions do these productions attain in tropical regions. This, though covered with very large, strong, and hard spears and prickles, he resolved to mount, and endeavour to learn by a more

extended view the cause of the strange moaning noise he heard.

Not without a good deal of difficulty and much hand scratching he clambered up about five feet, and was able to command a prospect over everything in all directions. But, most unfortunately for him, a rolling mist still hung and drove about the plain, rendering everything indistinct and uncertain. That he could make out moving objects afar off he felt sure; but, gaze as hard as he would, he was unable to decide upon their nature.

Meanwhile, the sound came nearer and nearer, and at times he could distinguish individual noises apparently close to where he was. He came down from his prickly perch in the cactus, hot, panting, and irritated, for it was both difficult and painful climbing.

'I'll sit down and wait, and see what turns up,' he said to himself; and selecting a mound covered with short grass, and which was a little raised above the level, he did so, and then proceeded to pick the cactus-thorns from his hands and arms, and moisten the sores with water from his leathern skin.

Presently he heard a loud and distinct bellow, certainly not more than a quarter of a mile distant.

An unmistakable sound this one.

Peter Carder rose to his feet.

'Jerusalem!' he cried aloud; 'if that ain't for all the world like our old cow when she's mad!'

He listened again, and the truth broke upon him.

'Darned if it ain't a horrid critter o' some sort, a wild buffalo of the prairies! Guess there's a whole

herd of them, that will mayhap gallop right over us; sitch, I've heard, is their manner and custom to strangers of the human race.'

Peter Carder drew his revolver and carefully cocked it.

'Guess I'll give that bellowing chap one between the eyes,' he went on, 'if he comes a-charging at me.'

The words were scarcely out of his mouth than another bellow was heard, louder and nearer, accompanied by the crashing of brush and the trample of hoofs.

'Thunder! here he comes. I have heard they're most ugly critters to deal with—come rushing at yer with their snout. Guess I'll lay down and hide.'

Accordingly Peter Carder selected a spot where there was a big tuft or patch of tall grass, and there he carefully disposed of his long carcase, lying with his head just at the verge, so that he could see what sort of beast this was he could hear bellowing and tramping and crashing along, if it should happen to come out into the open.

He had scarcely bestowed himself comfortably, revolver in hand, and ready to start up at a moment's notice, than the noise was still louder, the hoof sounds louder, and he was able to see the grass waving and swaying to and fro.

The next moment there burst out from the tall grass and ranker growth into the comparative open ground, an animal, not an enormous one, but still fierce-looking, and quite big enough to prove an ugly customer.

It was a rather small-sized, thick-set bull-buffalo, and appeared to be a young one.

It had either been greatly frightened or greatly enraged, for its eyes gleamed most savagely, and it was panting and snorting and bellowing by turns.

When the beast had advanced a few yards into this open space—perhaps thirty or thirty-five yards across—it suddenly stopped short, and sniffed the air.

‘Jerusalem,’ said Peter Carder to himself, ‘the cussed critter scents me. Guess I’ve a good mind to get up and run. Only it seems to me,’ he pursued, arguing with himself, ‘that he’ll make better tracks, and go faster than me. I do believe, too, that if I could get a hold of his two horns I could get the best of him, only he might get hold o’ me with his horns, and then I reckon I should have a good deal the worst of it.’

The buffalo still hesitated, as did Peter Carder.

It happened that in slightly shifting his position he clumsily pressed the trigger of his revolver, which instantly went off.

Being close to the edge of the thick patch he had chosen for concealment the flash and the smoke were visible, as was the report audible to the buffalo, which, after a moment’s hesitation, gave a loud bellow, put its head down, and charged.

Peter Carder got to his feet as quickly as he ever had done in his life; for the beast was coming right at him, and there was no time to be lost.

When the buffalo was distant about twelve or fifteen yards, he fired, two barrels—

Crack, crack.

But still the brute came on, somewhat leisurely perforce; for there were several awkward gaps and fissures.

Again he fired—

Crack, crack.

Again it seemed that the two barrels were wasted, for the animal came straight on.

Having fired off one accidentally, he had but one remaining, and so far as the shooting was concerned he would then be a done-up coon.

So he resolved to reserve his last fire for close quarters.

On came the buffalo, clumsily, not very fast, but still with evidence of enormous power.

Its snorting nostrils and glaring eyes and foam-speckled head and chest, evinced its savage fury.

When within about ten yards only, Peter Carder fired.

A loud bellow followed the crack of the revolver; but the buffalo still charged on.

Peter grasped his tomahawk or small hatchet, a formidable weapon wielded by a powerful giant like the Yankee, even when wielded against the buffalo.

It was impossible to tell the result of the shot, only that the furious beast still kept charging on.

Now, Peter Carder, if you are going to stand your ground you will want all your nerves, all your strength, against yon rover of the plains.

Reader, we will now transport ourselves to the encampment on the little hill, where we left our other friends fast wrapt in the arms of Somnus.

They slept profoundly, as was likely to be the case with healthy men, fairly wearied by travel and hard exertion.

It has before been mentioned, however, that only four slept at a time, one being constantly on watch; for, as the slightest thought will convince

anybody, it would be extreme folly for all of a party to give way to slumber together, thereby laying themselves open to sudden attacks and surprises, by either wild beasts, savages, or white enemies.

Peter Carder had the last watch, and of course as each of the others lay down through the course of the night, after keeping his two hours, he went to sleep, and troubled himself not as to awakening, relying on being called in the morning by the man of the last watch.

Now, it is a certain fact that even the most vigilant and light sleepers will not wake if they go to sleep fully expecting to be aroused at a certain time, if they are not so aroused.

The same, if they had to depend on their own powers, would probably awake before the time.

I, myself, have known a man who could always awake within ten minutes of a given hour—and generally before.

Thus it happened with our friends—even the vigilant and cautious Don Ramon slept a sleep worthy of Rip Van Winkle, the ancestor of the Copper Dutchman.

As for that worthy, of enormous strength and weight, he too slept as though he meant to lay in a stock for future use.

Andrew Battel, young, healthy, and scarcely done growing, also of course slept the deep sleep which such young fellows can, especially towards morning—the time when old and unhealthy men grow restless, and are unable to sleep at all.

As for the Irishman, his hard and sonorous snoring sufficiently proclaimed his happy state of deep slumber.

The sun crept up to the horizon, peeped up, and then rose in all his glory; but still our friends slept.

How long they would have slept this delightful sleep it is impossible to say, though the increasing noise and uproar on the plain, one would think, must soon arouse them.

They were shaded from the rays of the sun, they having ample facilities for making up quickly camp tents, and so they were free from the danger of being awakened in that manner. And so they slept on, in spite of the bellowing of, as it would seem, numberless cattle and other sounds—ominous sounds, at least to some of the party, they would have been.

Presently, however, it befell that a small and beautiful paroquet, skimming the ground slowly and gracefully, making for its nest somewhere or other, with a wild nut in its beak for its young ones, was attacked and pursued by a larger bird of the same species.

The paroquet was flying close to the camp, and only about five feet from the ground, at the moment it discovered its enemy.

Turning suddenly in its course, it at the same time gave vent to a shrill scream of terror and rage.

It was but a little bird; but that scream was harsh, loud, and earsplitting enough to be worthy of the Roc, of *Arabian Nights'* fame.

Andrew Battel awoke, suddenly and completely, with a start. The Irishman grunted, rolled over, and lazily opened his eyes.

'Arrah, now, let the woman alone! Lave alone batin' her till mornin'.'

A characteristic speech, which proved his notions were vague as to where he was, and so forth.

The Copper Dutchman awoke, too, though not with the same vigour and suddenness as Andrew Battel.

But the Peruvian, Don Ramon, though he had undoubtedly overslept himself like the rest, did well to atone for it.

Before the frightened paroquet had finished its shrill scream, he was on his feet with one bound.

Seizing his rifle and revolver, he rushed out, and gazed over the plain.

In a few moments he was joined by Andrew Battel, and a little later by Samson Von Burr.

The bright morning sun was now fast dissipating the mists, which were rolling away and clearing off the plain. Through the patches of mist could be seen numerous black spots moving at a great pace, and other black spots moving at greater pace still.

Bellowings and roarings at all distances were borne on in the morning air, and presently there came a loud prolonged yell.

Don Ramon placed his hand on the shoulder of Andrew Battel, and said quietly, though seriously,

‘Indians, by the Virgin; that is the war-whoop of the Sangtos, a fierce and warlike tribe, the warriors of which live almost on horseback. They come from far away to the south. I knew not they ever penetrated to these regions.’

‘Is there any danger?’ asked Andrew Battel.

‘Danger! we shall have to fight for our lives,

and die as we stand, all together; for the Sangto Indians neither give nor take quarter.'

'That's a certain fact,' put in the Copper Dutchman calmly; 'and I reckon we had best begin at once making a breastwork; they're sure to see us—they have seen us. The Sangtos are too keen-eyed not to make out a camp a few miles across the plain.'

'Right, my friend,' replied Don Ramon. 'Let us, however, pause a moment before we act. They have come up into these parts on a marauding expedition, a most successful one hitherto—see the droves of cattle galloping wildly.

'They have been driven off from the grounds of the white settlers, near the coast and the river—Portuguese, Spanish, English, and American—they have made a grand swoop, a great haul. Thousands of wild cows and bulls now rush on before them in mad terror.

'Their object must be to drive this great herd far away. Away past pursuit by the white settlers and volunteer cavalry, who, if they delay, will soon be on their track.

'No, my friends; they will not attack us unless we show a disposition to attack them—not a likely thing. We can, however, do better by putting up a long pole, with the symbol of peace at the top. For as our friend Senor Von Burr remarks, it is quite certain they have seen us. Go you, Andrew, with the Irishman and cut two poles as long as you can find, and bind them together. Myself and Senor Von Burr will prepare the symbol, one known to all the tribes of this continent, ay, as far south as Patagonia.'

In a few minutes the poles were cut, spliced

together, a strange hieroglyphic arrangement of thin strips of cactus stem, crossed and recrossed, being placed at the top.

This was then planted in the ground, and fixed upright.

‘That will have its effect, I am quite sure,’ remarked Don Ramon. ‘They have quite enough to do to keep together those wild stampeding cattle.’

Suddenly Andrew Battel cried:

‘Where is Peter Carder?’

All looked round in blank amazement.

‘Where is Peter Carder?’

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON THE TRACK.

WHERE is Peter Carder?

A question easy to ask but impossible to answer.

They looked blankly in each other’s faces.

Peter Carder was certainly not there, not with them, not within sight; for from where they all stood together they could see the interior of the rough tent, or rather canvas cover and screen.

‘It was Peter Carder’s last watch,’ said Don Ramon. ‘He should have called me.’

‘I called him at two hours after midnight,’ said Samson Von Burr, ‘and then turned in myself.’

‘What on earth can have become of him?’ said Andrew Battel. ‘Not fallen into the hands of the Indians, I should hope.’

As he spoke he looked hard at the One-eyed Snake, who, however, gave no response one way or the other, remaining very grave.

'See if you can discover any traces of him,' he said to Andrew: 'take the Irishman with you, and make a circuit around the camp. Do not go far away, and observe particularly if there are any broken branches or trampled grass. Samson Von Burr will remain here, and consult with me as to what is to be done.'

Andrew Battel and Darby the Irishman started, and striking together into the prairie-grass, which in places was above their heads, commenced a wide circuit in search of tracks of the missing man.

Don Ramon set about a close scrutiny, leaving the Dutchman to keep a look-out on the plain.

Examining his hut, his quick perceptions informed him that Peter Carder had taken away with him his revolver.

Further researches showed several bundles of dry grass and wood, which the missing man had collected to light the fire.

Nothing else which could in any way indicate what had become of the man was to be discovered.

Rejoining Samson Von Burr, and looking out on the vast expanse of the *pampas*, he now had a clear view, for the mists had been completely dispelled by the sun.

About a hundred, or perhaps a hundred and twenty mounted Indians, driving before them a vast herd of cattle—thousands and thousands.

The frightened beasts rushed not straight ahead, but turned sharp to the right and left, and it was only by most furious riding, hunting, yelling,

and shouting that they were kept at all in the desired direction.

The Indians galloping along in a line, at a distance ranging from fifty to a hundred yards apart, formed a line about five miles long across the plain.

At the end of the line on either side there was an additional force of the most skilled and daring horsemen ; for it was here there was danger of a great number of the cattle rushing off and escaping back to the pasture from which they had been sundered, or roaming at large about the plain, neither of which would suit the Indians.

Consequently, the more Don Ramon saw of the scene, the more secure he felt that they would not go out of their way to attack the camp.

The bellowing frightened herd, in droves and flocks of scores and hundreds, tore over the plain in tolerably compact array. On the outskirts, however, many bulls and cows dashed off wide, singly or in parties, and, getting beyond the line of horsemen, escaped. These nearly all made their way in a direction leading to where they had been driven, retracing their steps at a hard gallop.

‘Pity,’ said Don Ramon, ‘some of these cattle do not run loose or browse on the prairie about here, instead of making tracks back home.’

‘Guess some of ’em will sure to stray, and we’ll have a chance of lassoing a couple.’

‘Ah, if we could only get hold of one young bull, what a piece of good fortune it would be ! We, knowing their nature, and having to deal with them, could train them for draught or burden in a few days.’

‘It certainly is terrible hard work at times

dragging that punt-wagon. Seems to me we've got a little too much weight with us.'

'Not a bit, my friend; you'll find it a very different thing in a year's time to say. A quantity of preserved and compressed provisions will have been eaten, stores, canvas, and all other things will have been considerably consumed, ammunition will have been used, and you will find we shall be lightened by about one half, and of a great deal which we had back again. Still, if we had one of those little beauties—the handiest and strongest buffaloes in all the pampas for size—it would be a great thing, for, fierce as they are, they are not hard to tame.'

'Guess we couldn't get near enough. If we were mounted, now, it would be another thing altogether!'

'Here come our two explorers,' said Don Ramon. 'They are carrying something with them.'

'Looks like wood; I expect they have cut some for the fire.'

'They didn't take anything with them except their revolvers—nothing to cut wood.'

In a minute or so Andrew Battel and the Irishman joined them.

'We've found tracks of him,' said the former; 'he evidently struck across the plain, cutting branches and such brushwood as there was as he went on. Evidently he intended gathering it up coming back.'

'How far did you follow the traces?'

'For nearly a mile; then we came to a place trampled all over, evidently by the hoofs of some beasts. From this spot there are many gaps and

paths broken in the long grass, so that it was impossible to guess even which, if any, he had followed.'

Both Don Ramon and the Copper Dutchman looked very grave over the matter, and Andrew Battel judged by this and other things that in all probability Peter Carder had fallen into some great peril.

'What do you think can have happened?' asked the young Englishman; 'surely he has not been captured or killed by the Indians we saw? You said that they were too much occupied in driving before them the stolen cattle to go out of their way to attack white men.'

'That is true, my friend: I said to go out of their way; but suppose that our comrade, strolling across the pampas, should throw himself right in their path by bad fortune? Then, I fear, it would be a different matter altogether.'

'You think, then,' urged Andrew Battel, more deeply concerned, 'that our unfortunate friend has strolled away, and come within their grasp and been captured?'

'It seems too probable that such is the case. If he has fallen across the Indians, it is one of the outlying scouting parties of six or eight together. You will, if you look, see several of these far ahead of the line, galloping amongst the frightened cattle, in some instances actually ahead of the stampeded cattle. These parties so act to keep up the panic, and drive the cattle madly forward; for these buffaloes and cows of the prairie have a strange habit, if their alarm is not thoroughly sustained, of suddenly halting, stopping dead in their mad career, facing about, and standing in a pha-

lanx stubborn and obstinate, until another phrensy seizes them, and away they go at headlong speed back over the ground they have traversed, overthrowing and trampling under foot everything in their way.'

'He may have lost his way,' said Andrew Battel.

'It is possible,' replied Don Ramon ; 'I have thought of that. We will light the fire, and pile on plenty of green bush and grass, so as to raise a thick column of smoke. For the present we can do no more.'

All four then went to the encampment, and whilst three built a fire, Don Ramon carefully scanned the whole surface of the rolling pampas with a powerful field-glass he had.

The cattle still came rushing on, the Indians driving them on as before. As the latter drew nearer the hill on which was pitched the camp, it became evident that they would pass within half a mile. This was unpleasantly close quarters, for it was never possible to depend on how Indians would act in any case.

It was possible that, though dead against their own interests, they might, when so close, turn and endeavour to overwhelm the small party by a sudden rush.

As it appeared more certain each moment that the whole lot, cattle and Indians, must pass close to the encampment, and, indeed, probably envelop our friends on either side, whose danger became more apparent, under the direction of Don Ramon all went to work to throw up a breastwork, which could not be ridden over by mounted men. The check such an obstacle must cause would give time

for the deadly Henry rifles to be brought into play; and right well the Peruvian knew that it would be a short and easy task to empty many saddles. Ultimately, should the Indians prove obstinate and determined, they might, by sheer numbers, overwhelm and kill or capture the small band; but certain it was that this would not be done without great loss at first on the part of the Sangtos.

In little more than ten minutes a rude breast-work of earth, logs of wood, brush, and stones, was thrown up all the way round, and at all events they were safe from being ridden over by mounted Indians at the first rush.

A plentiful supply of prickly cactus, which grew here to great size, suited admirably for a *chevaux de frise*, and a very good defence against cavalry was thus roughly improvised in a few minutes.

Meanwhile the whole lot came tearing over the plain; the frightened half-maddened cattle roaring and bellowing, and making the hard ground reëcho with the thunder of their many hoofs, and the fierce indomitable Indians whooping, screeching, and yelling in an infernal fashion.

Not more than a mile now separated the camp from the rushing tide of cattle, which, coming on in a firm unbroken phalanx, seemed as if it would sweep right over the hill, overwhelming all before it. Of this, however, there was no real danger, as wild cattle, when stampeding, will never ascend a hill, but will always split, dividing on either side.

‘Look, look! be jabers, look! There’s a man dragging a buffalo along. Will we shoot him, mister?’

It was the Irishman who had thus suddenly made a discovery.

CHAPTER XIX.

PETER CARDER'S CONFLICT.

THE attention of all was, of course, attracted to the spot to which the Irishman pointed.

It was some fifty yards from the foot of the hill, and just on the edge of a remarkably tall patch of prairie-grass.

A cloud of dust, a dim vision of a buffalo and a man struggling and rolling over together in undistinguishable confusion, and then both disappeared and were hidden by the high grass.

Dust, waving of high grass, and the sound of a buffalo snorting, told that the strange conflict, whatever it might mean, was still going on.

Don Ramon, Andrew, and the Copper Dutchman looked to their rifles, and remained prepared to use them if necessary.

'I never before knew one of those Indian skunks,' remarked Von Burr, 'with pluck enough to tackle a buffalo single-handed. On my life and soul it's wonderful! I shouldn't care about it myself, that's a fact.'

'It's certainly extraordinary—altogether beyond me,' replied Don Ramon, who was evidently at a loss; 'for from the short glimpses I got I could see that the man was holding on to the beast, and, indeed, had lassoed it, for I saw the rope round the horns.'

'I can't understand,' remarked the Copper Dutchman, 'how it can be worth while for an Indian to trouble about a single buffalo while his companions are driving myriads before them.'

Andrew Battel at this moment gave a shout.

‘Hulloa! Hurra! Peter Carder, by all that’s holy! I saw his head and face for a moment as he rolled outside the grass. He’s out of sight now again; but I can see the grass still waving. Come on, lads.’

With these words the young Englishman leaped lightly over the rude breastwork they had thrown up, and ran down to the spot where the conflict between man and buffalo was going on.

The others quickly followed, and witnessed a strange scene. Just as they came up Peter Carder had got his tall carcass on his legs, while the buffalo also struggled to its feet at the same moment.

Peter was tugging vigorously at a rope, by means of which he sought to drag the buffalo out into the open and up the slope.

The animal, however, resisted this violently, and by its violent plunges was gradually dragging the giant after it.

Peter had seen his comrades coming to his rescue, and now shouted for them with a loud voice.

‘Do you come here! Andrew, lad—Samson Von Burr, come to my help!’

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when Andrew and the Copper Dutchman seized hold of the rope also, and by their aid the tables were turned upon the buffalo bull, and it was dragged out into the open and some yards up the hill.

‘Look out, lads!’ shouted Peter Carder presently. ‘He’s going to charge.’

Sure enough, the bull, finding he could not

resist the strength of the three, lowered its head and rushed at the trio with a loud bellow.

Peter Carder, who seemed to have some experience in the matter, immediately dropped the rope and ran to the left, crying,

‘Run! run! Watch me. Do exactly as I do, and he can’t get away.’

The buffalo’s charge was an unsuccessful one, and our friends noticed the animal was dead lame. Blood, too, was streaming from its right leg from a wound about a foot above the knee. This, of course, was bound to have a weakening effect, as it flowed freely, and would account for the fact of a man, albeit a giant like Peter Carder, being able to tackle a buffalo single-handed.

As it was, the Yankee was in a most rueful plight. He was covered from head to foot with mud and dust; his canvas trousers were torn and stained with blood in several places. His shirt, an especial one, and manufactured for him by solicitous relations, was torn all to shreds.

It was a sad loss to Peter Carder, that of his shirt, which was about his most cherished possession. As to mending it that was impossible, whole patches having been dragged off by the bull’s horns.

The whole of his brawny, muscular breast was bare, and on the strong ribs were scratches, bruises, and even wounds an inch or more long.

He boasted a bad black-eye, had a swelled mouth—one tooth being clean knocked out—and altogether presented the appearance of having been severely knocked about.

‘I meant to take that buffalo prisoner,’ he afterwards said; ‘and, by thunder! I did it, too,

though he fought most tremendous hard, to be sure.

But to proceed.

As soon as the buffalo had made its rush and failed, it very quickly slackened speed, lame and tired, and, turning, sought to make for the plain.

This, however, was not according to the views of Peter Carder. The rope attached to the buffalo's horns dragged along behind for some two yards.

This Peter Carder again seized, Andrew and the Copper Dutchman following his example; and, getting on the upper ground, endeavoured to drag the buffalo uphill.

But though overpowered, the strong and stubborn brute was not conquered, and charged again and again, causing our friends to repeat their former manœuvre—drop the rope and scatter, again seizing it when the charge had failed, and again succeeding in dragging the brute a yard or two nearer the camp.

Presently, just as they were tugging and pulling their best, there whizzed past them a light coil of rope, which looped itself in the most marvellous manner around the fore-legs of the bull. In another instant the brute came to earth heavily, and, thus hampered, lay helpless at the mercy of its conquerors, panting, snorting, and frothing blood.

CHAPTER XX.

IN SEARCH OF WATER.

THE overthrow of the bullock was accomplished with such marvellous ease and rapidity as to fill our friends, especially Andrew, with astonishment.

The bull went down as if shot; and after several desperate attempts to struggle to its feet, which were quite futile by reason of the lasso tightly compressing his fore-legs above the knees, he lay still, exhausted, conquered.

‘My friends,’ said Don Ramon quietly, ‘you see what I have just done. The predominance of intelligent skill over brute force. Your tugging and straining the bull resisted almost successfully, and would have given you trouble yet, when I, with a jerk and whirl through the air of a loop of cord, have the animal powerless and at my mercy.’

This was an obvious fact, and Don Ramon now proceeded to bind the hind-legs of the buffalo also.

‘I guess we can let him rest where he is for a time; he can’t possibly stir. Senor Carder, you are very much bruised and knocked about; let us come up to the camp. I gathered yesterday herbs, leaves, and berries, which will have effect in easing the pain of your wounds, and giving you rest.’

The four friends, followed by the Irishman, who seemed taken aback at the way adventures followed each other in succession, walked back to the camp, leaving the buffalo prostrate where he fell.

‘What shall we do with our prize? Kill him for fresh meat? We’ve not had a taste since the end of the week we set sail.’

‘Kill him! Holy saints, no!’ cried Don Ramon. ‘That is to say, unless he is incurably lame. Did you shoot him in the shoulder, Senor Carder?’ he asked of Peter.

‘No; I only hit him on the right fore-leg. I believe that brought him down; but he’s lame from the fall, not the bullet.’

‘Ah! that is well. Probably it is but a bad sprain. These wild cattle soon recover from such-like accidents. If he recovers he will be invaluable to us as a beast of draught or burden. I propose we do not strike our camp to-day.’

All had the greatest confidence in the Peruvian, and the proposal was at once agreed to. Indeed, they were by no means loth for a day of comparative rest after the hard toil they had undergone.

There was this to be said on the latter score, however: that as they advanced into the country they would get acclimatised to the intense heat, and also their frames, muscles, and their very constitutions would become hardened, so that they would be able to stand much more fatigue and make much longer and more difficult journeys.

Just as they were entering the encampment Don Ramon stopped, and looked out on the broad expanse of pampas. The vast herd of cattle had scattered on either side of the hill where they had pitched their camp, somewhat nearer than half a mile.

The Indians followed them, and, as Don Ramon predicted, took no notice of the white man’s camp,

but drove straight on, driving their plunder before them.

Already the foremost of the cattle were miles away, and it was now Don Ramon took notice of a fact which assured him that water was no great distance from there.

A darker patch could be discovered in this direction, and Don Ramon, pointing, said,

‘There is water there, about two leagues distant. We will draw lots presently to see which of us must go and get a skinful, for we shall want some for the bullock.’

‘I reckon we had better draw at once,’ suggested the Copper Dutchman, ‘so that whoever has the task may at all events get there and accomplish part of the task before the heat of the day comes on.’

This was done, and the lot falling on Samson Von Burr and Darby Cogan the Irishman, they started off, each well armed, and provided with two large skins for holding water.

Peter Carder, Don Ramon, and Andrew Battel were thus left at the camp.

It was, indeed, almost necessary that Fortune should have decided thus ; for Peter Carder, hurt and sore as he was, would have been quite unfit to have undertaken such a task in the blazing heat of the day ; whilst it was almost as necessary for Don Ramon to remain, to give the hurt man comfort by his rare skill and knowledge of herbs and healing leaves. Placing him in the shade, he took off the remnants of his leather shirt, and then proceeded to sprinkle his body all over with water.

This he continued for fully an hour, till from the evaporation the Yankee felt quite cold.

The skilful leech next wiped the body dry with soft cotton, touched most of the wounds with the aromatic balsam from the medicine chest, and then placed over the wounds, which the balsam had caused to smart intensely, some of the leaves he had abstracted yesterday.

On the other wounds he placed leaves without balsam. The bruises and sprains he treated in quite a different manner, and in the course of an hour he had completed the surgical part of the business.

Then he proceeded to enfold the body of Peter, much to that worthy's surprise, in a roll of wet calico, loosely wrapped round him.

Having a small pan of water by his side, he directed the patient to sprinkle himself as he felt the calico drying, and declared he would suffer no pain in an hour's time, having also administered a mild herb in the form of a decoction, which would act as a mild sedative and calmer of pain.

CHAPTER XXI.

PETER CARDER'S STORY.

LEAVING Peter to rest a bit, Don Ramon and Andrew went to look at the captured animal.

The poor brute was evidently suffering a good deal, especially from thirst, and, with its parched tongue lolling out of its mouth, was lowing piteously.

Don Ramon, after examining the shoulder and the bullet-wound in the right fore-leg, returned to the tent.

The bull, thoroughly cowed by pain, thirst, and its utter helplessness, lay quiet enough; but when the Peruvian approached with some wet green leaves and a shallow pan of water, it made a desperate effort to rise at the sight of the fluid.

This, however, was impossible, and our two friends proceeded humanely to place the pan so that the poor brute could drink.

'We can't spare much of this clear water,' said Don Ramon, 'for what they will bring back will be thick with mud, having been trampled in by thousands of cattle, as by this time it is. Just enough to put the poor brute out of his agony.'

The buffalo lay very quiet after having partaken of the water, and did not kick or struggle when our friend extracted the bullet from his leg.

This done, they returned to the camp, where they found Peter awake, cheerful, and free from pain.

Though it now wanted only a short time of noon, and the heat was intense, neither of our friends felt inclined to sleep.

Andrew Battel prepared some coffee, and then getting all together under the shade, they called upon Peter to relate all about his adventure with the buffalo—an adventure which altogether had turned out exceedingly fortunate.

The reader knows all about it down to the time when Peter fired his last charge without succeeding in stopping the march of the buffalo.

We need not repeat it, but will take up the story at this point.

'I thought that my last shot had produced no effect whatever—in fact, I had missed, and cursed myself for being such a muff. I stood armed with

this small tomahawk, only fit for wood-chopping, in my hand, prepared to do battle.

‘To my surprise and joy, however, without the slightest warning, the brute tumbled slick down. I had a coil of rope, which I had taken with me to bind up the wood I had cut, hanging on my left shoulder. By chance, there were a loop and slip-knot at one end, and the thought suddenly struck me—I threw it over the bull’s horns, drew it tight, and before the animal could struggle to its feet, I had run the length of the rope. The buffalo at the same moment endeavoured to rise, and presently did struggle partly to its feet; but, by a vigorous jerk of the rope, I threw him down again.

‘I now looked about in every direction for a tree, or even a stump, within reach. Could I have found one I should have been very quickly out of danger; for all I should have to do would be to fasten my end to the tree or stump, and then withdraw out of reach. Unless the beast could break the rope, which, being of buffalo-hide, was not likely, the animal would be a prisoner, and I could return to camp and get your assistance in killing or capturing it, whichever you thought fit.

‘But there was nothing of the kind in sight—nothing at least but the stem of a big cactus, on which, to tell the truth, I did not place much dependence.

‘However, resolving not to throw a chance away, I ran to this quickly, fastened the rope around it, about four feet from the ground, and then removed myself to some considerable distance, and waited to see the result, hoping that the stump would hold my enemy.

‘As he struggled to his feet he glared around

him, and, quickly espying me, charged most desperately. I had just time to observe that he was lame of the left shoulder, when he came to the end of the tether and stopped.

‘For a second I thought the shrub would stand the shock, but I was soon undeceived.

‘The buffalo was staggered a bit ; but, making another rush, up came the cactus by the roots, and away I went as hard as I could run, hoping I could outrun the beast.

‘For a time it was so ; but now I was to have a lesson of the power, wind, endurance, and obstinacy of these wild bulls.

‘For the first two hundred yards I kept my ground—even gained. I had, however, been running at a tremendous pace.

‘And the ground, though very well for a buffalo, was desperately bad for a man ; and, more still, I had slightly sprained my ankle, and was by no means able to keep up the top pace I had started. Fortune, however, had not entirely deserted me. When I stopped and turned, the bull was about sixty yards distant, and coming on furiously. Just at that moment, in the blindness of its mad rush, it stepped into a rut or crack, and again went head over heels a more tremendous buster than before. This I hoped would effectually stop him, and rested to take breath. But no, the buffalo struggled to his feet, and though evidently more lame than before, after a moment’s pause again charged.

‘Of course I started and ran, and having got fresh wind was able to get well ahead, as I now was passing through a quantity of cactus, which greatly favoured my escape.

'The plant the buffalo was dragging was constantly catching in some of these, pulling him up with a "round turn," as the sailors say, sometimes throwing the beast on his knees.

'Now again Fortune favoured the brute.

'The frequent tearing through, and contact with, other shrubs had completely torn the up-rooted cactus to pieces, and there did not remain enough to offer any serious inconvenience.

'On the other hand, the buffalo was getting worse, as regarded the lameness of the left shoulder, every moment, and the blood was flowing profusely from the right leg.

'This I knew must weaken the animal, and after resting till it was within fifteen yards of me, I again started off.

'As before, I was able to get ahead at first, but ere long began to suffer desperately from the heat and difficulty of breathing, and felt compelled to stop in order to get breath, and stood still in such an exhausted state until the animal was within ten yards of me; again I started off and ran for dear life.

'It now seemed likely to become a question of endurance—a matter of which would be first exhausted.

'The bull's lameness, which constantly increased, was in my favour, as also the blood which ran in a constant stream from the bullet-hole I made in his leg.

'There were other things which told in favour of the buffalo. The ground was better suited to him, he was accustomed to it, while for me at a running pace it was most terrible travelling.

'Then, again, his wind was much better than

mine, and but for the fortunate fact of his lameness it would have been all up a tree with me. By the way, I wished then there was a tree; I guess I'd have nipped it up the trunk pretty quick.

'And so the game went on, as you English say, pull devil, pull baker, till at last a change came over the state of affairs, and what with the heat and dust I was well-nigh choked, and knew I couldn't last out running at this pace much longer. I had done pretty good work, for whereas when I started the buffalo was driving me further away, I managed to circumvent the varmint, and got between him and the camp.'

'But see here, now,' asked Don Ramon, 'you speak of your wind giving out, of being nearly choked, didn't you also feel yourself getting weaker from your great exertion?'

'No, senor, there was just the beauty of it; the buffalo bull did, and that fast, but I seemed to go as strong as ever, only I couldn't fetch breath.

'And that air fact, which I took most particklar note of, put me up to a new idea. I must tell you first, though, that I had lost my tomahawk, and only had in the way of weapons a small pocket-knife and an empty-barrelled revolver, with no ammunition to load even if I'd got time.'

'There you are wrong, very wrong, my friend; if you are not more careful you will some day lose your life through want of a pinch of powder and a bit of lead.'

'Reckon I will gain as I go on,' said Peter Carder.

'You will have need to,' remarked the One-eyed Snake gravely, 'for I see before us, as it

were with prophetic eye, a long course of hardship and danger and desperate toil.'

'Well, I guess we'll have to take it as it comes and make the best of it,' was the Yankee's philosophical remark. 'Can't expect to get a diamond as big as an ostrich egg without just a little trouble, I reckon.'

'Go ahead with your story, Peter,' said Andrew Battel; 'I want to hear how you got on with the buffalo down to where he ran you sprawling on the ground.'

'Well, you see,' Peter Carder went on, 'I'd been making tracks pretty fast towards camp, and when this new plan struck me I wasn't more than a hundred yards or so from the foot of this hill, says I to myself, "Now, Peter, my friend, it's a right down sartin fact as you can't run any more, you're most regular done up that way."

"Now that cussed bull he can run—he's got a lot o' run in him yet. There's the situation. What's to be done? Just this. I can't run away—dead licked in that line. Well, then, I must just stop and fight, that's about it; fight the buffalo beast hand to hand—hands, arms, and legs against horns and hoofs." Guess the buffalo was a good deal took aback when, instead o' running as I had been a doin' I all at once stood my ground. As he got close he kinder slackened for a moment, and seemed as though he couldn't make it out. Now this just gave me a chance, for he didn't come at me full rush. Before the varmint knew what I was up to I had him fast, one hand on each horn. I just gave his neck a jerk and over he went, coming down whoppo on his broadside. This staggered him for a moment or two,

as you may guess, and gave me time to get hold of the end of the rope, which was still fast to his horns. Then just as he was struggling up, by a good sudden push I brought him down again.

‘This I did several times till he grew artful, and getting his feet charged again. I kept hold of the rope and stood my ground, and just as he was close up, rushing at me with lowered head, I jumped on one side, ran a few yards, and again brought him down by a hard pull at the rope.

‘All the while I was getting nearer to the camp every minute. I don’t know why I didn’t holloa out to you coons. Guess I hadn’t mind enough though.

‘One would have thought that, lame and bleeding as the varmint was, he’d hev begun to cry a go by this time. But not a bit of it.

‘His rushes grew more frequent, and were more difficult to avoid, for he had learned to pull up short, wheel round, and charge again directly after he’d missed me.

‘At last it got so hot that I couldn’t keep out of his way any more; and then we two just had to fight it out.

‘I was able to twist him down whenever I could get a good grip of his horns. But then he had me down two or three times, and I had a rough time of it then. Yes, sirree, thought every bone in my body was crushed, and all my ribs squeezed in.

‘I was rolled over and over, half-tossed, very near gored, bruised, scratched, and pretty well tore to pieces. Luckily, though, my strength held, and my heart didn’t give way; and presently, getting a good grip again, I threw him a buster, which quieted him a good bit.

'I could have got away now, that is a fact; but I didn't want, and sartin I didn't mean to. I was real riled and savage now, and I jest made up my mind I'd take this tarnation bull prisoner, and bring him captive to the camp. I stuck to him; we had two or three more "downers" together, and I had just got the varmint to the foot of the hill when you coons spotted me, and then it was soon all over.'

'Quite an exciting fight,' said Andrew Battel; 'rather you than me, Peter. You shall do all the bull fighting, so far as I'm concerned.'

'Wall, yaas, it was roughish work,' said the Yankee; 'and it struck me that it might ha' suited Samson Von Burr better, he bein' copper-built, copper-bottomed, and a ton and a quarter weight. Guess I'll let him have a turn next time.'

'Hand me the spy-glass, Andrew. I think I can see our water-party on their way back.'

CHAPTER XXII.

RETURN OF THE WATER SEEKERS.

THROUGH the powerful though small telescope, the water seekers could be plainly discovered staggering along under their load, each having a large skin full of the muddy fluid (for muddy it was beyond their expectation, even warned as they had been by Don Ramon on the subject) slung over their shoulders.

'It will take them a good hour and a half yet,'

remarked Don Ramon, handing the glass to Andrew Battel; 'they are coming very slowly, bringing something with them, I think. What do you make of it?'

'Yes,' replied Andrew, 'they've got something beside the water skins. By Jove, it's something alive! they have stopped now; it seems to be struggling; they have it in a bag, or wrapped in canvas, or something,' pursued the young Englishman rather vaguely.

He handed the glass again to his companion, who eagerly looked through it.

'They've something alive with them, that's a certainty, but what it can be I cannot imagine. It seems about the size of a monkey or an anteater, and if they were bringing it in dead I could understand it, because both are good eating; but why on earth they should trouble to bring it in alive, whatever it is, and with their load of water too, is quite beyond me.'

'O, perhaps,' remarked Andrew, 'they just did it for caprice; a fancy, perhaps, to keep it alive as a pet.'

'The big Irishman might be fool enough,' replied Don Ramon, 'but not the Copper Dutchman; he knows too well the serious nature of South American travel to trouble about toying or playing on the road. There is some reason for this, but what I can't think.'

'Look, look,' cried Andrew Battel suddenly, 'see, it is escaping—it has escaped—no, they have it again. Ah, yes, with my naked eye I could see a bit of the struggle. Look quick through the telescope.'

Don Ramon quickly placed the glass to his eye.

But it was too late to see. Both of the water-bearers had thrown down their skins, and were now keeping, it would appear, occupied in securing the animal which had nearly escaped.

After a few seconds they rose, and the Peruvian could see the living thing on the ground, securely fast, in canvas or something, a sort of bag, but still kicking and struggling at a great rate. This Don Ramon could plainly make out with the powerful glass he had.

It seemed to puzzle and annoy him a good deal.

Andrew Battel, however, thought nothing of it; and whilst Don Ramon remained on the watch, he went into the tent where lay Peter Carder, and informed him of the fact that the Dutchman and Darby were bringing in something alive.

‘Bet your life,’ said the Yankee, ‘it ain’t nothin’ like so big and so fierce as my bullock.’

‘Well, scarcely,’ replied Andrew, laughing, ‘considering they are carrying it, at least the Copper Dutchman.’

‘Don’t know so much about that,’ replied Peter gravely; ‘these here bullocks run a little bit smaller than that chap o’ mine sometimes; and yer see the Copper Dutchman he’s a wonderful strong man.’

‘Still I don’t think it’s a buffalo bull or cow they’re bringing in,’ pursued Andrew; ‘’tain’t big enough; guess it’s more like to be a monkey.’

‘Yah!’ cried Peter Carder, ‘what’s the good of a monkey? They ain’t big enough for the skin to be o’ any use, and they’re no good for eating.’

‘We may be glad enough to put up with monkeys before we’re finished,’ remarked Andrew

Battel. 'Don't you remember Don Ramon's story, how he and five Indians lived twenty days on a monkey and a few crawfish, no other animals or fish being procurable?'

'Guess I'd rather eat my boots!'

'Suppose they were already gone?'

Before he could reply to this, Don Ramon came in, appearing a good deal excited.

'Our friends are approaching,' he said, 'but seem to have a trouble with the live thing they are bringing. I fancy that the Irishman has been wounded, or received hurt in some way; how I cannot possibly tell. Wait you here, Andrew, with Peter; I am anxious about this.'

Don Ramon provided himself with herbs and other medicaments, which he made up into a small parcel, and then hastened off across the plain to meet the returning water-carriers.

Andrew Battel and Peter Carder, whose pain had all been spirited away by the skilful treatment of the Peruvian, gossiped in an unconcerned manner, both being young, light-hearted, and with but little experience of the rough ways of wild life.

Peter Carder, having lit a pipe, had just commenced a Yankee yarn about his own state and township, and himself and wrestling exploits in particular.

'You see,' he remarked, somewhat boastfully, 'I've a right to talk a bit about wrestling, seeing as I've wrestled with a wild buffalo of the prairies and thrown him easy, won the battle against him.'

'Gently, gently!' cried Andrew, 'you must not forget, friend Peter, that you were having a rough time of it when we came to help you; and in right down fact that the buffalo would have made pump-

kin squash of you; yes, sirree!' Andrew added emphatically.

The young Englishman by degrees was picking up the Yankee ideas and dialect, as, indeed, is not to be wondered at, considering his intimate and close relations with Peter Carder.

Just as he was leaving, Peter Carder called out to him,

'Give me my revolver, Andrew; I guess I'll load it again whilst you are gone.'

He directed Andrew where to find it, but the latter, on looking, could not see it.

'Never mind,' said the Yankee, 'I guess I'll hunt it up; it's somewhere close by in the tent, sartin sure.'

'Don't you get up,' said Andrew, 'you're very comfortable as you are, and you know the doctor said you were not to walk to-day at any rate.'

Andrew Battel searched, and presently found the pistol and handed it to Peter Carder, who proceeded to load it carefully.

'There, my beauty, you'll do, I reckon,' he said, as, having finished, he laid it down by his side.

Just at this moment there was heard the sound of a whistle from afar off over the plain.

Andrew Battel at once recognised it and its significance.

'Don Ramon's whistle,' he said, 'he wishes me to join him; perhaps he is in need of assistance.'

The young Englishman, determined to be prepared for an emergency, armed himself with another revolver, a repeating rifle, a sharp cutlass, and a small hatchet.

Thus accoutred, he hurried down the hill and

across the plain, in the direction whence came the sound of the whistle.

‘Peter Carder’s got it all to himself now,’ he thought, ‘monarch of all he surveys, and that sort of thing; wonder how he likes it.’

He knew that the Yankee, notwithstanding the slow deliberation of his speech and actions, was very impatient and restless, and, above all things, hated to be left alone.

‘Guess he’ll roam a bit, especially if we are all away any time.’

Thus thinking, he made his way gaily across the pampas, being in excellent spirits, with no thought or care for danger.

Though it was now late in the afternoon the sun was intensely hot, and Andrew had reason to regret his folly in not slinging his small water-flask over his shoulder. However, he knew he should find plenty of water when he joined the others, and pushed on at his best pace, guided as to direction by an occasional whistle.

He came upon them all at once. They were grouped round and under a very large cactus plant, so as to take advantage of its shelter.

The Copper Dutchman was standing, the Irishman prone on his back, whilst Don Ramon, kneeling by his side, was applying a paste of chemical leaves to a wound in poor Darby’s left arm.

Andrew was at once struck by the terrible, the death-like pallor of the wounded man, who lay with eyes closed, a profuse perspiration on face and neck, and looking altogether more dead than alive. Occasionally his powerful frame would be convulsed by a sudden spasm, followed by a low moan of agony.

‘What on earth’s the matter with Darby?’ asked Andrew Battel anxiously. ‘How dreadful bad he does look; has he been shot or speared?’

Don Ramon shook his head.

‘No, bitten.’

‘Bitten! by a poisonous snake, I suppose?’

‘No, worse than that. I could deal better with a snake bite.’

All the while Don Ramon spoke he was attending assiduously to the wound, and did not raise his eyes to his questioner.

‘Not by a snake? What then?’

By the Tiorano Diavolo, which, being interpreted, means the Tievan Devil, a most horrible, repulsive, and deadly dangerous animal. In my life I never heard of one so far north as this.’

‘There the beast is,’ said the Copper Dutchman, pointing at the same time to a piece of canvas, which was fastened by skewers, and withes, and other ways around something about the size of a toad.

‘That’s the Tievan Devil,’ the Dutchman went on gloomily, ‘he very nearly gave me a nip. I’m afraid it has done for our poor comrade, spite of Don Ramon’s skill. See how the beast writhes and wriggles.’

‘Shall I shoot it?’ cried Andrew, raising his rifle. ‘Why let such a venomous monster live?’

‘No, no!’ exclaimed Don Ramon, ‘do not shoot it. We must keep it alive, troublesome and dangerous as it is likely to be!’

‘I can’t see,’ persisted Andrew, ‘what on earth’s the fun of keeping an ugly twisting brute that’s already nearly done one of us to death.’

‘You shall hear all about it when we get to

camp, then I'll tell all the wonders I know, and the more wondrous things I've heard about the Tievan Devil. We must get poor Darby up as soon as possible, leaving the water-skins and the rifles here to return for them.'

'What on earth can this Tievan Devil be?' thought Andrew Battel, 'something very terrible evidently.'

And he eyed the canvas parcel with disgust and fear.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TIORANO DIAVOLO.

OF course there was a risk of serious loss in leaving such valuable articles as firearms unprotected on the plain, for though there were no Indians in sight now, it by no means followed that there were none about.

Still, however, it was an absolute necessity, for the Irishman was a heavy man, and almost entirely helpless, certainly quite unable to walk, even with assistance.

So it was necessary to carry him, a most arduous task.

All who have had practical experience know that it is hard work for four soldiers to carry a wounded comrade, even on a proper stretcher; much more so, then, for our friends, two of whom alone carried him, the third relieving one of them every five minutes.

Thus, each man had a five minutes' spell once in ten minutes.

In this manner, and by dint of great perseverance and unsparing use of wind and muscle, they carried the wounded man, now quite unconscious, across the plain, and safely laid him under the shelter, not of his own tent, which was ragged, miserable, and dirty, probably as in his native land, but in that of Don Ramon, who would do his best to effect a cure, desperately deadly as was the hurt.

‘It seems I am to have plenty of practice for my medical skill,’ he remarked. ‘First Peter Carder, now this poor fellow, who I’m afraid is in a very bad way.’

As he was speaking, he was mixing a cordial of some kind in a horn mug, which he presently held to the mouth of Darby, and poured a part of the contents in.

‘Here, Samson Von Burr,’ he said to the Copper Dutchman, who was standing by, ‘here’s a gill of my wine left in the cup, take it to Peter Carder; I’ll stay here and look to this poor fellow. If he doesn’t come back to consciousness soon, he’s a dead man. If he is not able to see the sun go down he will never witness another rise or set.’

The Dutchman took the mug and went out.

Presently he came back.

‘He ain’t in his tent,’ he said. ‘I thought he might have strolled round the other way.’

‘Not in his tent! why, I told him he was not even to rise until the effects of the powerful medicine had passed off. He must be somewhere close about. Go and find him and make him go in, or he’ll get himself into a fever.’

Just as the Dutchman was again going out, Andrew Battel came into the tent.

'Where's Peter Carder?' he asked, staring about.

'That is what I want to know,' replied Von Burr. 'I've just been to take him a cordial from the doctor here, but he's not in his tent.'

'O,' said Don Ramon, 'he cannot possibly be far off. I don't think he could walk far, for the herbs I have given him, though soothing, cause weakness and even delirium. Go out and give a holloa. I expect he got up, and, seating himself on some comfortable slope, has just dropped off to sleep in the sun.'

This suggestion was at once adopted, and soon the *pampas* rang with the sonorous metallic thunder of Samson Von Burr's voice, and the clear note of Andrew Battel.

'Pe-ter Car-der! Pe-ter Carder!'

But there came no answer.

No echo even vouchsafing to mock with her phantasies in reply.

They made a circuit right round the little hill on which his camp, already the scene of much stirring adventures, was pitched, and ascertained beyond all doubt that Peter Carder had not fallen asleep anywhere in the sun—in fact, that he was nowhere within the circle of clear space, from which rose the little hill.

They returned to Don Ramon with very grave faces, and reported their news—or, rather, absence of any.

The Peruvian himself now looked both serious, mystified, and anxious.

'He was alone—he was ill. Perhaps he was languid and dreamy.'

'No,' said Andrew Battel, 'he was quite him-

self. He insisted on cleaning and loading his revolver, and was doing so when I left. Here it is, loaded and all complete. I found it laid by the head of his shake-down.'

'What can have happened, senor?' asked the Dutchman. 'I can only think of one thing.'

'Nor I. What is your thought?'

Samson Von Burr replied by a strange gesture, or symbol, perfectly intelligible to travellers in the wild regions of South America.

To Andrew Battel, however, it was perfectly unintelligible, and he looked with wonder and concern from one to the other.

'You think that something serious has happened to Peter?' he asked.

'I'm afraid so,' replied Don Ramon.

'Ah! and you know, or suspect strongly, what has befallen him. Tell me, it is right I should know, for am I not his earnest and best friend?'

The Peruvian, looking him in the face, said, gravely, this one word, 'Indians.'

'Ah!' cried Andrew Battel, 'I see now. You think that during my absence, whilst he was alone here in the camp, a party of Indians coming by surprised and carried him off.'

'No,' said Don Ramon; 'hardly that, or there would have been some signs of a struggle, for you say you left him awake and lively.'

'I am afraid,' remarked the Dutchman, 'that feeling impatient at being left alone, he ventured out to look around to see if he could make us out approaching; then it was probably that three or four skulking wretches pounced upon him, and either killed him or carried him off.'

'So far as I can see,' said Don Ramon, 'that is the most probable interpretation of his disappearance. Weak and wounded as he was it is nearly pretty certain that he would not start off voluntarily on an objectless march into the *pampas*.'

After some further discussion, consisting principally of gloomy remarks and suggestions, it was decided that as soon as Don Ramon had done his best for the wounded Irishman, they should all start on a search for the missing man, or some trace of him.

It was now approaching evening, and for them it seemed almost certain that the sun would go down sorrowfully.

A few days previously, on the day they successfully effected their escape from the Portuguese vessel, there were six of them, all strong, healthy men.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SAD OFFICE.

THE first disaster was the death of the unhappy negro, torn to pieces by sharks; then shortly followed the next mishap, which, however, was not altogether without advantage, for though Peter Carder was grievously bruised and knocked about in the doing it, he certainly succeeded in capturing a young buffalo bull.

After this followed the disaster to the Irishman, the bite of the dreadful and malignant *Tiorano Diavolo*, which the Dutchman translated as

the Tievan Devil, and from the bite of this horrible monster the poor fellow lay at the point of death.

And now, as though to accumulate disaster upon disaster, came the sudden, silent, and mysterious disappearance of one of themselves—one of the original four—Peter Carder, the Yankee.

No wonder that a feeling of gloom oppressed our three surviving friends; for in good truth the Irishman could scarcely be said to be alive, so utter was his prostration, so hopeless seemed his state.

Low moans of pain were indeed almost the only signs of life he gave.

Don Ramon, always calm and impassible, showed less feeling or emotion than either of the others. Having done the best he could for the poisoned man, he said, as cheerfully as he could,

‘Now, comrades, there is yet an hour before dark; we will spend three-fourths of that in a search for our missing friend, or at least some signs of his fate. As there may be Indians about, we must go armed and all together. We will make three searches around the hill; the first one hundred yards from the foot, the second at three hundred yards, the third at a quarter of a mile; and if within that radius we find no track nor trace of the missing man, then we may safely conclude that he is away beyond our reach and ken.’

The search was made.

Another sun went down on these remaining adventurers, as Andrew slowly and sadly ascended the hill on which they had pitched this their first real camp. There was scarcely time to light up

the fire when the short tropical twilight faded into night, and Samson Von Burr, Andrew Battel, and Don Ramon, the Last of the Incas, found themselves on the summit of a little hill looking over the *pampas*, watchers and companions of the dead, for during their absence the Irishman had given up the ghost.

The tropic sun rose in the morning bright and glorious, driving before him the mists and vapours of the night.

None of them had lain down, as, in view of the terrible fact of the disappearance of Peter Carder, all felt that on their watchfulness and vigilance their very lives depended.

So they all sat up around the embers of the fire, which was purposely kept in such a state as to give out a dull red glare, but no flame.

Behind them, under cover of the canvas, was the dead body of the Irishman, and also thrown on a heap on the ground the canvas bag in which was confined the horrible and deadly Tieván Devil.

Occasionally one or two of them would doze off for a few minutes, but there was no such thing as sound sleep, or any thought or attempt thereat.

It was a wretched and miserable night; and when the gray light of morning broke, each of the three looked haggard and uneasy in mind, Andrew Battel especially, who had suffered much from intense excitement.

The fire was lighted, water boiled, and, after a hearty cup of coffee and dry biscuit, the first duty of the day was at once commenced—the digging of a grave for their dead comrade.

This was soon effected, as they were well provided with good tools, and all knew how to use them.

Wrapped in his blanket, poor Darby Cogan was lowered into the seven-foot trench dug for him, the earth shovelled in, and so they bid a last farewell to the remains of their comrade who had died by a violent death.

There was no thought of striking camp and moving away that day; for all hoped, at all events, to hear again some tidings of Peter Carder, even if he should never again be restored to them.

Don Ramon remained on the summit of the hill as sentinel.

The other two were to make another exploration in search of their missing comrade.

Before they went, and especially addressing Andrew Battel, he said,

‘Now look here, boys, I’m afraid that our friend has unfortunately fallen into the hands of some sneaking skunks of Indians.

‘It behoves you to be right down careful, especially when away from camp. While we keep together we are comparatively safe, for we have something here which would give any Indian that ever rode over the prairie such a scare as he would not get over for many a day.’

They knew that he alluded to the extraordinary creature which bore the strange name of Tievan Devil.

Andrew could not repress a shudder, for he remembered the terrible fate which had overtaken the unfortunate Irishman who had paid with his life for his temerity.

‘If anything had happened to either of us,’

said the Dutchman, 'we should have thought it hard to be left to the mercy of the Indians; and I, for one, don't feel inclined to break camp till we've had another look round for poor Peter Carder.'

'Nor I,' answered Battel, whose noble nature and generous heart revolted at the idea of leaving a companion in distress.

It was not so much his sudden and mysterious disappearance which disturbed the minds of his companions, as the dreadful uncertainty of his fate.

The most convenient theory to account for his vanishing as he had done was his abduction by Indians. Yet they had no proof of this.

There was a harassing cloud of doubt about the matter, and they one and all felt a sense of unknown danger, which made them start at any unwonted sound, and grasp their rifles tighter.

The day was overcast, which rendered the atmosphere more endurable, as the fierce heat of the sun did not beat down upon them in all its violence.

A hideous screaming noise was heard, which caused Andrew to spring to his feet; but he was speedily called to himself by Don Ramon, who said, with a loud laugh,

'Ha! ha! I thought you'd have been used to that by this time. It's only Tievan Devil.'

'What an unearthly cry it has!' said Andrew, resuming his seat.

'That's its peculiarity; and an Indian will run a mile when he hears it.'

'I've seen them,' said the Dutchman, putting down his pipe and looking gravely at Andrew;

‘I’ve seen ’em run like one o’clock. They’ve all been sitting round their fire, when of a sudden the cry has come from some bushes hard by, and the critters just did make tracks.’

‘I should like to have a look at him,’ Andrew said.

The One-eyed Snake rose, and, without saying a word, went towards the spot where he had thrown the creature down in the rough canvas bag he had selected for it.

Bringing the bag to the spot where his companions were sitting, he said to Andrew,

‘It’s a horrible thing to look at, and you don’t get it out of your eyes for some time—my word for that. I’m used to it; but when you first see it, it’s a caution to any man.’

A piece of cord was tied round the neck of the bag, and Ya Roni loosened it; but he took care to place it between his knees and hold a tight grip of the animal’s body about the middle, so that it could not escape.

‘I would not have him make a clean bolt was it ever so,’ he observed; ‘because I mean to keep him for emergencies; there is no telling when he may be useful. Now then, are you ready? Look out!’

Andrew Battel gazed like one petrified on a head and shoulder protruding itself from the bag.

He saw the head of an attenuated wicked-looking old man with a freckled beard, shrivelled cheeks, sharp piercing eyes, a gigantic nose, wonderfully chiselled, and two yellow-looking protruding fangs, which made the mouth hideous.

The body was about the size of that of a full-

grown otter, but covered with a thick coat of coarse rough hair.

It glared fiercely at his captors and gnashed its teeth as it made impotent struggles to escape, and ever and anon its mouth opened, its jaws wagged with vicious frenzy, and the awfully shrill and piercing cry like that of a human being in his death agony, burst forth and rang in the ears of those around.

'Put it back,' said Andrew, turning away with a sickening feeling of disgust.

'Have you seen enough of it?' asked the Dutchman with a grin.

'More than enough. I don't wonder at the Indians fearing such a thing as that.'

'More especially,' put in Don Ramon, 'when it's a most dangerous enemy to tackle, and very difficult to kill. I've seen it fight like a wild cat with two charges of shot in its body, but I believe the Indians have some superstitious feeling regarding it. The face suggests the migration of some lost soul, stained with a terrible crime, to the body of a beast. I don't know the feeling exactly, though I've heard it stated that it does exist.'

As he finished speaking, he with a dexterous jerk shook the Tievan devil back into the sack and quickly fastened the mouth of it as securely as before.

Sounds resembling a human being cursing in blind fury came from the depths of the bag, and completed the horror with which Andrew held the peculiar monster.

'I'll feed the cuss presently,' said Roni Sarka, 'he won't hurt just now, if he does not have anything. Now I have gratified your curiosity re-

specting the Tievan devil, and told you as much of his natural history as I can think of, let us return to the subject which occupied our attention.'

'Peter Carder—'

'Must be saved,' the Snake went on, 'that is to say we will do all we can to save him, though mortals can never make sure of success.'

'The worst of the affair is we have no clue to him. The Indians, if they have been here, have been very clever, for they have left no tracks.'

'Nor,' said Andrew reflectively, 'have they plundered the camp. I should have thought that would have been their principal object.'

'Ah, my boy,' replied Don Ramon, 'you don't know these cunning fiends as well as I do. There are Indians lurking about here, they've got their eyes on us and mean to make another attack. They love to mystify any one, and they like to go in a round-about way to gain their ends.'

'Well, what's to be done?' asked Andrew Battel, in his practical way.

'Just this. We won't strike camp yet awhile,' said Ya Roni. 'I'll stay here and guard our belongings, while you and the Dutchman start out afresh over the *pampas* and try to find some trace of Peter.'

'I'm willing to search till I drop,' said Andrew, springing to his feet.

'I never leave a friend in the lurch,' remarked the Dutchman, with his habitual phlegmatism.

They took a slight repast before starting, looked well to their arms, and started in different directions arranging to make concentric circles.

The One-eyed Snake busied himself during their absence in a variety of ways.

He attended to the wants of the Tievan devil, and saw to the wounded buffalo, which he intended to make work as a beast of burden, as soon as it was well enough to bear the load he should put upon it.

When his friends had taken their departure, he swept the horizon with a glass, but the surface of the prairie, as far as the eye could stretch, was undotted by a human being.

There was not the slightest trace of Indians, though buffaloes could be seen grazing in herds at various places.

CHAPTER XXV.

ANDREW BATTEL MAKES A DISCOVERY.

THE atmosphere was close and sultry.

Not a breath of wind was stirring, and everything betokened the near approach of a storm.

The clouds overhead began to lower, and afforded some slight protection against the heat; but Andrew, after parting with the Dutchman, felt locomotion difficult, owing to the oppressiveness of the air.

He was not a man to be discouraged, however, and he pressed on with a good heart, over the undulating prairie, keeping himself on the alert, and ever fearful of a surprise.

It puzzled him sadly to think what had become of Peter Carder, and he had but little hope of finding him; all that he expected to do was to discover some trace and track, which would give him some clue, and enable him in conjunction with his

friend, to follow him up, and eventually effect his liberation.

Ill and wounded as he was, it would have been the height of cruelty on the part of the Indians to kill him outright.

‘If that had been their intention they would have done so,’ he argued, ‘when they found him alone and unprotected in the camp.’

That they were cruel he was well aware, and he knew also that they were crafty.

He indulged in a hundred various speculations as he walked along.

At the edge of the horizon was the black line which indicated the commencement of the forest.

To penetrate so far would have been dangerous as well as fatiguing.

He kept his eyes fixed upon the ground with as much care as an Indian would have done, so that nothing could escape him.

For some time his exertions were unrewarded with success.

At last he uttered a cry and sprang forward, sinking on his hands and knees in the long rank grass.

It seemed as if one or more persons had lately passed over it, and without much difficulty he perceived some drops of blood, which had fallen and dried on the blades.

But what had attracted his attention in the first instance was a piece of brown holland, which appeared to have been torn out of a larger bit.

When Peter Carder disappeared, he had on a light coat made of the fabric called holland, and it seemed to Andrew that some scuffle or halt had taken place hereabouts, and that the blood and

the scrap of the coat were left to bear testimony to it.

This theory was combated by the recollection of Peter Carder's weak state, which would make him perfectly passive in the hands of his captors.

It was more likely that a halt had been made, and that Carder had himself torn this piece out of his coat, and cast it on the ground in the hope that it might lead his friends to follow in his track.

If nothing more, it was a token of the direction in which he had gone or been taken.

Suddenly a heavy tread and angry snort caused him to resume an erect position, his rifle was at his shoulder in an instant, and he looked around him.

A buffalo of enormous size, and evidently a bull, confronted him. He had not noticed the approach, which had been more rapid than gradual.

The animal was enraged at the intrusion of a stranger upon its domain, and Andrew hailed its presence as a piece of luck, as he had wished to encounter a bull buffalo singly, and now was his opportunity.

Thinking to achieve an easy victory he fired cautiously.

The buffalo reared at the moment he fired, and his shot took effect in its hind quarters, doing it no material injury, and causing its rage to rise to fever heat, owing to the pain occasioned by the wound.

To load again before the creature rushed upon him was impossible.

So he threw his rifle on the ground and seized

his revolver, which was stuck in his belt, and which he knew would serve him well if they came to close quarters.

Uttering a roar which would have stricken dismay into a heart less stout, the bull lowered its head, showing its terrible horns, and pawed the ground furiously.

Then it made a rush and a bound, and Andrew narrowly escaped a tyke—to use a Yorkshire phrase—which it intended to bestow upon him, by springing nimbly on one side; quickly recovering itself, the buffalo looked for its enemy, and discovering him, prepared for a second spring.

Two bullets from the revolver were fired, and took effect in a fleshy part of the body, without inflicting any material injury or touching any vital part.

‘He’s hard to kill,’ thought Andrew Battel.

Still standing on the defensive, he prepared himself for another attack.

The bull was snorting with rage and tearing up the ground with its feet.

Its long horns glistened as he moved his head, and made it look very ferocious and formidable.

This time Andrew stood still and waited its approach, intending to fire point blank.

He did so.

The buffalo ran at him, and he aimed a bullet at his head, but, striking the temple, the ball glanced off, without inflicting any greater injury than a flesh wound.

The next moment he felt himself hurled violently to the ground, the eyes of the animal flashed over him.

He saw the sharp points of the deadly horns

bent down towards him, and gave himself up for lost, expecting to be transfixed every instant.

Repeating a prayer for aid to that Almighty Providence, which is always the hunter's best friend and safeguard in the awful solitudes of the new world, he again raised his pistol.

By some accident the cap had fallen off, and it missed fire; giving himself up for lost, he closed his eyes and prepared for mutilation and injury, if not death.

Half a minute passed, and he was unhurt.

What had become of his enemy?

Opening his eyes, he was astonished to see his friend the Copper Dutchman, who, following the prescribed circle, had met him at a most critical juncture.

Seeing the state of affairs, he promptly advanced to the buffalo and seized him boldly by the horns.

It was now a trial of strength.

The bull twisted this way and that, making frantic efforts to escape from the unexpected thralldom in which he was held.

But the enormous strength of the Dutchman was more than enough to match that of the buffalo.

Using a prodigious effort, the Dutchman twisted the neck of the huge beast as he would that of a chicken; bones were heard to break; and, with the spinal cord snapped, and the vertebræ broken, the creature fell on its knees with a soft low, which was its dying cry.

Presently it fell over on its side and lay harmless, kicking convulsively, and jerking spasmodically.

In a short time its convulsive twitchings were ended, and it lay still in death.

Andrew Battel had, by this time, recovered from his fright; the stupor which the near approach of death always produces having worn off, he rose to his feet.

The Copper Dutchman, with a practicability peculiar to him, had begun to cut the beast's throat, with a view to skinning him and bringing the finer portions of the carcase back to camp.

'How can I thank you?' asked Andrew warmly.

He extended his hand, and the Dutchman, putting his knife between his teeth, shook it with both of his.

'You were nearly gone,' he said; 'these animals take a deal of killing if you don't hit them in a vulnerable part.'

'How did you manage it?' asked Andrew Battel, gazing wonderingly at the yet quivering body of the big buffalo.

'There was no resisting my weight or my strength,' said the Copper Dutchman with a smile of satisfaction; 'he could not shake off a ton weight and more, so he was obliged to have his neck broken with as much tenderness as I could throw into the operation.'

Andrew laughed; he could afford to do so now that the danger was over.

'Bear a hand,' said the Dutchman; 'a little of this fresh meat won't be at all bad for dinner.'

Taking his knife from his sheath, Andrew fell on his knees by the side of the buffalo, and, with a will, assisted his friend to skin and make him ready for the table.

When this was done, the Dutchman said, 'And now what have you found? I saw you had something in your hand when the bull ran at you.'

Looking down, Andrew perceived the piece of brown stuff which he had dropped in his fright.

It was lying at his feet.

'I found it near here,' he said, 'and it is part of poor Peter's coat.'

The Dutchman handled it, turning it this side and that, and came to the same conclusion.

He also examined the ground and the blood-stained blades of grass.

'You are right,' he said at length, 'Peter passed by here. We had best go and tell Don Ramon, he understands these Indians, and will advise us what to do. Just carry some of those bull steaks up to camp, and we'll make a meal.'

Andrew loaded himself with steaming meat, and together they hurried back to the camp.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MARCHING TOWARDS WATER.

FRESH beef is always acceptable on the prairie, and Don Ramon applauded the prowess of the Copper Dutchman as the savoury steaks hissed and sputtered on the fire.

The weather was in a very threatening state, and it was the opinion of the One-eyed Snake and the Dutchman that a severe storm would take place before evening.

'When it thunders and lightens in these re-

gions, it just makes your eyes blink a little bit,' said Don Ramon, with a smile.

'There is something grand to me about a great convulsion of Nature,' remarked Andrew, 'the sublimity so occupies my attention that I have no time to think of danger until it is all over.'

'I've seen big trees shivered into bits of wood just large enough to make matches,' said the Dutchman, 'and I calculate I've been in a few large storms in my time, putting aside that in the mine which made me what I am.'

The sky grew thicker overhead.

Ya Roni, like a prudent leader, made all safe. A trench had been dug near the camp, to catch water, if any should fall in large quantities, so they were easy on that score.

'We are ready for it when it does come,' he said, as he pulled a thin mackintosh over his attire.

'I'm puzzled about Peter,' said the Dutchman; 'if the Indians have got him they're very mystifying in their conduct.'

'There's no trace of Indians on the Pampas, so they must have taken him a precious long way in a precious short time.'

'It's very unfortunate,' remarked Ya Roni. 'However, we can't stop here wasting our time, however dear our friend may be to us.'

'That is true,' said Andrew, as the fire of enthusiasm burnt in his eyes when he thought of the mission they had undertaken.

His glance met that of Ya Roni Sarka, and the fire of their souls seemed to mingle together. The blood of the Incas gushed through his frame wildly at the prospect of successfully achieving the object of their expedition.

‘We must push on at all hazards,’ concluded Don Ramon; ‘for we have an arduous task before us, and a long journey through almost unknown wildernesses. The perils we shall have to encounter are those of flood and field, strange animals, savages, and Heaven only knows what besides.’

‘We shall surmount them all,’ Andrew said, with the sanguine temperament of youth. ‘I have no fear.’

‘Nor I,’ said the Dutchman; ‘after what happened to me in the copper mine, I made up my mind not to flinch at anything.’

Suddenly there was a vivid blinding flash of lightning, followed by an awful crash of thunder, which went reverberating along the sky with sullen echoes for some seconds.

The storm had burst just over their heads.

The horrid crash of the thunder was mingled with the shrieks of the Tievian devil, who seemed to derive some diabolical satisfaction from the war of the elements.

Heavy rain began to fall, though the deluge was not of long duration.

The storm rolled off to the northward; the sun broke out again, and in a short time the rain was soaked up; the surface of the earth appeared dry, and it would have been difficult to tell that there had been a storm, if it had not been for the coolness of the atmosphere, which was rendered delicious and agreeable.

They caught some of the refreshing drops in blankets, and the supply was very welcome, for they were running short of water.

Indeed Don Ramon said: ‘This storm will enable us to stay here a day or two longer, as the

buffalo is supplied well enough for two days, and he is so far recovered that I think we shall be able to take him to draw our baggage.'

On the following day and the one succeeding it, the search for Peter Carder was continued without any greater success than before.

Reluctantly they were compelled to come to the determination to break camp and move towards the Orinoco, the dim dark line of which could be plainly seen at a distance of about sixty miles.

The buffalo answered their purpose beyond their most sanguine expectations; he was docile in the extreme, and saved them a vast deal of labour in drawing their boat-wagon and all their stores.

The piece of ordnance they carried with them was kept ready for action at a moment's notice, loaded with an explosive shell.

It was the Copper Dutchman's delight to look after Big Ben, with which he promised to do terrible execution amongst any hostile tribes that might molest them.

Ya Roni attended to the Tievan devil, giving it a more commodious place to live in, clearing out a strong wicker basket in which some stores had been kept for that purpose.

It was then that Andrew Battel had an opportunity of more closely examining this marvellous creature.

The One-eyed Snake had thrown it some buffalo meat, which it devoured eagerly, and allowed itself to be looked at without making any frantic efforts to escape or attack its captors.

He saw that it had three legs, one in front and the other two behind, and these legs were armed with long claws as sharp as razors in their edges,

making their possessor a most formidable antagonist.

'The Indians think,' said Don Ramon, as he put him away, 'that he can devour their bodies living and their souls after death.'

'Really!' ejaculated Andrew.

'Yes. It is this belief which makes them so dreadfully afraid of the ugly monster.'

The journey to the river Orinoco occupied three days. They passed by the spot where Andrew had found the fragment of a garment worn by Peter Carder.

And ten miles further on they found a similar piece, which gave them the idea that the captive—if captive he was—had intended to give them marks for their guidance when following in pursuit of him.

'Whoever is with him,' remarked Ya Roni, 'they have all taken the way to the river; that is good, we shall see something of him soon.'

Andrew Battel and the Dutchman concurred, and they pressed on with renewed hope of recovering their companion.

The spirits of all were light as air, for they had made a fresh start, and were drawing nearer the goal they had marked out for themselves, and also had fair hope of finding and rescuing their lost friend.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ONWARD.

AGAIN they started on the march up the banks of the deep, dark, slow-flowing river, which came

rolling slowly down, as though conscious of its vastness and the thousands and thousands of miles of country right away to the interior of the Great Southern Continent through which it had flowed and fertilised.

The banks when they started were low and hard, and tolerably level, sufficiently high enough above the water, however, to prevent any sludge or swampiness, and the wild untiring young buffalo, now becoming thoroughly tame, was enabled easily to drag the light wagon with its heavy load.

It was strange that the most fierce and obstinate animals should succumb to the will of man, under the influence of pain, hunger, thirst, and terror—that is to say, if also they are judiciously treated.

The sprain or bruise on the animal's shoulder was now cured; but the bullet-wound from poor Peter Carder's pistol was still sore and open.

Don Ramon, who acted on all occasions as surgeon and physician to the party, attended most studiously to the wounded animal, and after a great deal of trouble succeeded in extracting the bullet, a miserable pellet no bigger than the top of a man's little finger, but nevertheless capable, if lodged in the brain or other vital part, of killing either man or buffalo.

The animal soon became accustomed to him, and even conceived a strong affection for the man who had lassoed him and so principally contributed to his capture.

He would prick up his ears whenever he heard the footstep or voice of Don Ramon, and at the same time he would give a soft bellow.

As if free from any terror, he would come at once at the call of his subduer, and would follow him anywhere.

In this case Don Ramon had given excellent proof of the influence he had over the lower animals and the skill he possessed in taming them and bending them to his will.

The advantage of our friend in this case was enormous.

The strength of the buffalo in the way of draught, that is to say dragging the wagon over hills and uneven ground, was much more than all theirs together, so it fell out that, by lending their own aid at every pinch, they could surmount the most rugged and steep acclivity with their labouring wagon.

They marched on such a distance from the river bank as to keep under the shelter of the grand old forest trees.

The Copper Dutchman remained constantly with the cart, having volunteered for that office.

Andrew Battel, young, high spirited, and enthusiastic, could not restrain himself from frequent excursions to the river, often for many miles of their journey, not more than a hundred yards distant.

Occasionally he shot a wild water-bird, speared a fish, or caught sight of some tropical wonder, and frequently indulged himself by stripping to his light canvas trousers, plunging into the deep stream and swimming vigorously for a quarter of an hour or so.

He used to declare there was no harder work than walking, but with some this is a matter of doubt.

After four or five days' march they had made progress to the north-west of considerably over a hundred miles, now entering upon a different country, different in its aspect, different in every possible respect.

Animals and birds became more abundant, the foliage of all growing things showing to increasing advantage.

They were approaching on the very confines of one of those fertile belts or boards, sometimes several miles in breadth, which are to be found all over South America.

Don Ramon had over and over again warned Andrew Battel of the risks he ran in his prolonged baths in the river, and the dangers he was likely to encounter from some of the formidable denizens of the deep and sullen waters, in which he delighted to swim.

Although such advice was always taken in good part by the young Englishman, and he promised to be guided by it, he was too young and high spirited and fond of adventure to bear such counsels long in mind.

It would have been well for him if he had, for this inattention to the experienced advice of Don Ramon nearly cost him his life.

A halt had been made at midday under the grateful shelter of the thick and heavy foliage of the forest.

The spot selected was one which might have been fitly chosen for its picturesqueness alone.

Above the camping place a thick canopy of living green kept off the fierce rays of the noon-tide sun, the ground at their feet was flower-strewn green, and before them about a hundred

and fifty yards off ran the deep and dark Orinoco.

To Andrew Battel the temptation to bathe was irresistible; and the wagon, under the care of the Copper Dutchman, had no sooner come to a stop than he laid down his weapons and made off to the water-side.

The river, just opposite the camp, made a deep semi-circular bay, the camp being nearly opposite the centre of it, whilst about half a mile up stream, and a rather shorter distance down, two low and muddy peninsulas stretched out into the river and formed the sides of land circling the bay-like sweep.

It was half-way between them that the gallant and light-hearted young Englishman plunged beneath the dark waters—here as still and without a ripple as if they had been those of a lake.

Not a ripple gave any indication of a current, and as Andrew Battel rose to the surface and struck out with that intense sense of enjoyment so well known to all swimmers, the mirror-like surface showed not an undulation on its bosom, save that made by the muscular arms of the young man as he breasted the waters.

He had been but a few minutes thus enjoying himself, when Don Ramon stepped from the camp as far as the verge of shadow cast by the trees, and raising his field-glass, glanced round the line of forest and the expanse of river.

Suddenly he ran rapidly back to the camp, seized his rifle, and rushed in the direction of the river at the top of his speed.

What could he have seen?

A long way out Andrew Battel could still be seen, his wake marking the water behind him.

Was there anything else?

Yes!—another wake was ruffling the calm surface; nor had the Peruvian a doubt as to the enemy in pursuit.

THE CAIMAN!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ANDREW BATTEL AND THE CAIMAN.

CLEAR and loud the voice of the Peruvian came over the placid waters to the ear of Andrew Battel, who turned at the vibrating cry which he felt convinced was a warning of danger.

Of what danger he could not for some time even conjecture; but following with his eye the point indicated by the outstretched arm of Don Ramon he could just make out in the distance the dark head of the monster rapidly cleaving the water in the distance.

A wave of the hand from his friend sufficed to show the course he thought it best to pursue.

It was to strike out down the stream for the nearest and most easily reached of the jutting banks turning out into the river.

At once he saw the wisdom of the hint, and turning round began making every exertion to reach the bank in time to avoid the horrible death, otherwise almost certain to overtake him.

Unequal as was the contest as to speed between man and reptile, the former had one accident in his favour.

Andrew Battel had swam to such a distance from the centre of the bay in which the current was unfelt, that at the part of the river he had reached the flow of the river, though slow and sluggish, was appreciable, and he had this advantage, slight as it was, over the hideous reptile in pursuit, which was as yet in the still waters of the bay.

Marking the point at which he could most quickly land, Andrew Battel strained every sinew—never under any circumstances had he so exerted himself, for never before had he had to swim for life.

He had just been able to see that Don Ramon had started down the river in the direction of the jutting peninsula, evidently with the intention of offering what aid or assistance there might be in his power, when all other thoughts but the supreme one of escape vanished.

At first the efforts of the swimmer were so great that he found he could not long continue them, and a little reflection showed him that if escape was possible it could never be achieved by exhausting his powers at once.

Besides, if the monster did overtake him, his strength having been all expended in frantic endeavours to reach the land, he must of necessity fall an easy prey.

That, Andrew Battel determined should not be the case.

If he was to be overtaken by the terrible foe, he would not succumb without a struggle, hopeless though he knew that struggle must be.

Fortified by his newly formed determination, he turned and glanced over his shoulder for a moment,

entertaining a gleam of hope that his pursuer had abandoned the chase.

Vain hope! Closer by far than when he had first seen it, the horrible head of the saurian rose above the waters of the river, every scale sparkling in the fierce light of the meridian sun.

That the pursuit would not be abandoned by the monstrous crocodile was evident.

Andrew Battel turned again in the direction of the peninsula on which he had already discovered Don Ramon, who had reached it by the shorter and more easily travelled course of the banks.

The sight lent him fresh vigour.

Here at least was a friend willing and able to assist him, could he but reach foot ground in time.

Another chance, too, occurred to him.

His knife!

Yes! that was all right in his belt, and a gleam almost of satisfaction passed over his features as the hand he had dropped to his waist assured him of the safety of that trusty companion in many a strait.

At all events, he was not weaponless, and, although driven to encounter an enemy more powerful at any time than himself, and possessing, too, the advantage of having the coming battle-ground in its own element, he did not despair of victory, or at least of escape.

Already he could hear behind him the wash of the water as it glanced over the scale-clad shoulders and neck at each powerful stroke of the caiman—at every sweep of its immense tail.

Often as Andrew Battel had had to strain every nerve in moments of danger, never had he made such exertions as now.

His breathing was becoming thick and laboured, and he felt incapable of exerting the muscles of his legs and arms as at first; the nearer approach of his enemy seemed also to have had a paralysing effect; but at last he felt the water shallow, and instantly dropped his feet for ground—that advantage would be worth something.

It was mud! The black, slimy, yet tenacious mud of the Orinoco.

With a shudder of horror he withdrew his feet, and again struck out, with a feeling that it was the last struggle for life.

Don Ramon, he saw, was yet eighty yards off; but he saw, too, that his rifle was at his shoulder, and as his eye caught the sight, the ‘ping’ of a bullet close past him, and the flash, showed him that the Peruvian had just come in time.

The flash of Don Ramon’s rifle was followed by a frightful lashing of the water not ten yards behind Andrew Battel, as the enormous caiman made the water seethe with his dying convulsions.

The coolness and nerve of the last of the Incas had saved the young Englishman from a frightful death, and his ready hand was extended to raise him from the black waters which had so nearly been his grave; whilst the body of the monstrous amphibian sank into the mud which lay at the bottom.

It was well that Don Ramon was surgeon and physician as well, for the tremendous exertions made by Andrew Battel to escape compelled him to lie up for the next four and twenty hours—a period of time which would have been much longer but for the wonderful knowledge of the Peruvian chief.

CHAPTER XXIX.

NEWS OF PETER CARDER.

THANKS to his vigorous constitution, the young Englishman was soon able to pull himself together, and Don Ramon at once availed himself of Andrew Battel's ability to travel, to break up the camp and start up the river.

Hitherto they had met with but few signs of any inhabitants, but at the end of their first day's journey, many huts closely clustered together announced one of the miserable little villages of the River Indians, a poor and defenceless race who subsist by fishing, and who fall an easy prey to the savage Red-Skins of the more Southern tribes, who have nothing in common with the cowardly 'bankers,' as those Indians are called who live along the shores of the Orinoco.

A little trouble soon enabled Don Ramon to ascertain that the savages who held poor Peter Carder captive had passed close to the village within four and twenty hours, and no doubt could be entertained of their identity, as every tongue ran on the Patagonian giant whom they were carrying prisoner to the South.

The rate at which the Indians were travelling, as far as could be gathered from the reports of the 'bankers,' was such as to render pursuit with the wagon a matter of impossibility as regarded any chance of overtaking them; so, at least, it appeared to Andrew Battel, and all but Don Ramon.

'The trail may be a long one,' said the Peruvian, 'but it is well marked, and if I am not wrong, we shall be able to find a guide here who will

show us a short cut to some point at which the great northern trail passes, and where we can be quite as soon, or sooner, than the savages who have caught hold of Peter Carder.'

The knowledge Don Ramon possessed of the idiosyncrasies of the races of Indians of the Southern Continent, was now of the utmost advantage.

Ever and anon robbed and murdered by the warlike and powerful tribes whose home was further south, the peaceful dwellers by the Orinoco dreaded giving any information as to the movements of their enemies likely to be reputed to them, and certain, if it was, to draw down upon their defenceless heads the vengeance of the predatory Southern hordes.

Yet here Don Ramon's tact and perfect acquaintance with the habits of these people stood all in good stead.

He succeeded in persuading one of the principal men of the village—he would have been a chief in a tribe less peaceful—to lead their party so across the country as to intercept the march of the redskins, who had made a prisoner of Peter Carder, and toilsome and difficult the route was.

Leaving the well-marked trail of the successful ravager, the 'Black Fish' led our adventurers in a direction which at first seemed quite opposed to the route they should have taken, and, indeed, it took all Don Ramon's persuasive powers to induce his companions to follow him; instead of starting nearly due south-west, the rough and difficult road ran north-westerly, following a bend of the river which their guide informed them must

be crossed at that point, as the northern and western banks were to be their future route until they reached a wide but comparatively shallow part of the river, at which they would again regain the eastern shore, and which they would in all probability reach in advance of the Indians who had succeeded in capturing Peter Carder.

The crossing was made with the greatest difficulty, all Don Ramon's exertions being required to induce the young buffalo to take the water; indeed it was only by the assistance of Andrew Battel's strength, that the powerful brute was swum across to the other bank. Arriving there, however, he soon became as docile as ever under the hands of the Peruvian, and again attached to the wagon, they struck out down the farther shore headed by their guide the 'Black Fish.'

Rough and tiresome as their way had been before, it was now much worse; the tangled vegetation which stretched to the very verge of the water impeded every step, and the streamlets which descended at every few paces, to find the waters of the great river, compelled them to ascend their courses in order to find a ford at which they could cross.

But they soon saw the wisdom of the plan adopted by their guide.

The Indians, upon whose track they were, had been obliged by the very conformation of the river, which here formed a large semi-circular bend, to follow what may be called the arc, whilst Don Ramon and his party's route was that described by the chord, thus traversing about one-third of the distance.

The difficulties of the way did, in reality, make

it much more, but still they had every probability of taking the captors of Peter Carder.

The place at which the river was to be recrossed, as explained by the Black Fish to Don Ramon, involved a journey of four days at the rate at which they were able to travel, and they found, on reaching it, that high grass and trees were plentiful enough on the other side to afford them at once shelter and cover, and food for the buffalo.

Nor did many obstacles present themselves to the passage; true the river was deep, but flowing with the sullen and sluggish current, which is the most striking feature of the Orinoco, enabling a crossing to be easily enough made, and once over, their arrangements were soon made; and from their temporary camp they could trace the trail by which Peter Carder and his captors must come, for that they had not yet passed was evident to the eyes of their guide and Don Ramon.

Meanwhile Peter Carder was still carefully watched and guarded by the savages; his arms bound behind him by stout deerskin thongs, and no chance of any opportunity of escaping.

The tall Yankee took matters very coolly, keeping, however, a sharp look-out for any opening for a chance of leaving his redskin captors; no means had as yet been afforded him, and the same night that Don Ramon and our friends recrossed the river and camped on its eastern bank, Peter Carder was lying bound at the Indian camp, which had been pitched by the margin of a stream which formed an affluent of the great river.

This fact Don Ramon had ascertained whilst

watching the trail; he knew the Indians would follow on their southward route, and he immediately informed Andrew Battel and the Dutchman of his discovery, when it was unanimously agreed to attempt Peter Carder's deliverance.

But the Yankee had made up his mind that that very night should be the last of his captivity; for he had at last succeeded in rubbing through the deerskin thongs, by which his arms were bound, against the edge of the rock, which formed his resting-place. This had not been found out or even suspected by the savages who guarded him.

Peter Carder had thoroughly studied the ground before him and had arranged his plan, which, as soon as the tropical night fell, he proceeded to put into execution.

Stretching out his long legs, he rose gradually to his knees, and the next moment to his feet, and made for the water, but not unseen or unfollowed.

Two of his guards started in chase, and, just as Peter Carder entered the water, contrived to seize him; but the Yankee was determined to be free. Unable to shake off the savages, he threw one of his powerful arms round each of them, and dragged them into the water with him.

Thus hampered, he with great difficulty kept his feet; but he did progress, and the rapidly deepening water warned the Indians to let go their hold; Peter had no intention of freeing them, and had the stream not begun to shallow they would probably have been drowned; as it was, he fairly dragged them over to the other side, where, to his delight, Don Ramon, Andrew Battel, and the Dutchman stood ready to secure his pursuers.

CHAPTER XXX.

ANDREW BATTEL AND THE JAGUAR.

MANY months of arduous and toilsome journeying have been undergone by our friends since Peter Carder's escape, and we now find them more than a thousand miles distant from the scene of that adventure.

Through the dense forests of the tropics had they made their way, encountering at nearly every step some new-found danger; and on the very day we again take up the story of their journey, Andrew Battel had met with an adventure which had nearly put an end to his ever travelling further.

The camp for the night had been pitched at the foot of one of the spurs running down from a mighty range of mountains, whose heads, white with eternal snow, towered in awful majesty on high.

Coarse, rank grass grew around at a short distance, rising to the height of six or eight feet, but growing more sparsely on the ascent, but denser on the downward slope.

Andrew Battel was reclining on the slope of the hill-side, tired with the day's march, and quite unconscious of two glowing green eyes which glared on him, watching his every movement from amidst the tall grass.

His rifle was beyond his reach higher up the hill, and indeed out of sight, as the camp lay over a slip in the ground, so that his companions were quite hidden from his view from the position he occupied.

The only weapon he had was his knife, which

never left his belt, and lucky for him it was that he adhered to the rule of never laying it aside.

The two glowing green eyes had been intently watching Andrew Battel for a considerable time, their possessor, an immense black jaguar, only hesitating as to when he should spring on his victim.

The cat-like switching of the enormous brute's tail caused the grass to rustle, and attracted Andrew Battel's attention; and his first glance in the direction was met by the glaring eyes of the jaguar.

His hand instinctively sought his knife, which he had just drawn from his sheath, and was in the act of rising to his feet, when the monster was on him.

The first stroke of the animal's powerful paws, fortunately for Andrew Battel, missed the mark it had aimed at, the claws only ripping open his hunting-shirt, scarcely grazing the skin; the next moment man and brute rolled together down the slope into the rank grass at the bottom.

Although shaken and half stunned by the unexpected onslaught of the brute, Andrew Battel gripped it by the throat with his left hand and tried to bury his knife in the body with the other; but this was no such easy matter, as the brute fought fiercely with his hind claws; and, to avoid being torn by them, Andrew Battel had to keep as close as possible to the animal's body, while, in its turn, the jaguar tried to throw him off, so that it might be able to use them, when one rip of its powerful claws would have disembowelled him in an instant.

The hot fetid breath of the beast nearly made

Andrew Battel faint ; and, strong as he was, he knew his strength was as nothing to that of his adversary.

He must use his knife at once if he was to come off conqueror in the strife.

Again and again he tried to drive the broad blade between the ribs of the brute, but he feared to give it a chance of using its hind claws, and so could not get a fair stroke for some time, till at last, by a fortunate chance, he buried it in the animal's hide, a gush of blood poured from the brute's mouth over his head and face, he felt the muscles which had grappled him so firmly relax, and the next minute was able to shake himself free.

Blinded with the brute's blood, and frightfully torn on the shoulders and back, Andrew Battel, with difficulty, staggered to his feet, and made his way up the slope, till he reached the crest of ground over which lay the camp.

Don Ramon had just caught sight of him, and saw that something was wrong when Andrew Battel staggered and fell—exhaustion and loss of blood had overpowered him.

To rush to the prostrate man and carry him to camp was the work of a couple of minutes, and whilst Don Ramon attended to the wounds inflicted in the desperate struggle Peter Carder, arming himself with rifle and revolver, went to see what had happened.

Peter soon found the scene of the conflict, and the body of the jaguar, which he contemplated for some time in silence.

'Wal,' said he, at length, 'I always did think somethin' o' that young chap, but a feller that has

licked a black jaguar in fair fight has somethin' to brag of.'

Thanks to Don Ramon's surgery, Andrew Battel, after a day or two's rest, was able to carry his rifle, and again they all started to prosecute the long journey still before them.

The mighty rivers, by whose banks they had journeyed so many months, the Orinoco and the Rio Negro, had long been left behind them, and they stood now on the northern bank of the greatest of the rivers of South America, the majestic Amazon, whose waters roll on for thousands of miles from its source till they mingle with the waves of the Atlantic.

The point where they had encamped lay in the angle of land formed by the junction of the Copeya and the Amazon, or as it is often called the Maranon or Solimoes; and as soon as day broke they prepared to cross the river, their faces still turned to the mysterious land far yet to the south-west, but which they determined to reach in search of fortune.

The heavy mists rose from the surface of the river when they fairly floated off into the stream; but ere they reached the southern bank the tropical sun had cleared them away, and the river lay like a dazzling mirror under his rays; whilst on the shore they were now rapidly approaching gleamed the fresh verdure of the primeval forest.

'Let us accept this brilliant day as a happy augury of our future progress,' said the Peruvian, 'although our wanderings are not yet over, and look forward with confidence to ultimate success.'

The same hopeful spirit inspired the whole four men as they started again on their long

journey to the mysterious and far-away land—the El Dorado of the South American continent.

The reason for this fording of the mighty river was that the southerly bank was smoother, harder, and better travelling than that on the other side, which was cut up every mile or so by little streamlet creeks, swampy places, while at the end of every two or three days' travel they would come across a tributary of the parent river, when a safe and convenient ford had to be found, and their baggage and beast of burden safely conveyed across.

Some think that travelling in unknown regions of tropical climes is altogether pleasure and amusement, realising that the romance of the thing, the glorious foliage, the strange variety of beautiful birds, beasts, and fishes, outweigh immeasurably the slight toils, fatigues, and dangers to be undertaken, and, of course, to be successfully gone through with.

Ah! but those toils, those perils, those hardships! Few, indeed, save those who have personally gone through such a campaign as that on which our friends were adventuring, could possibly form any idea.

Right to the dregs did our friends drink of the bitter cup of desperate toil, hardship, constant and wearying danger, making a prolonged sleep impossible—the faintest doze a danger.

Travel-worn, dust-stained, with every ounce of fat worked off their bones, they toiled on, successfully combating, fighting, and conquering the grim demon, disease; and one year and three months from the day they set sail in the accursed Portuguese brig, they found themselves somewhere

near the noblest and most central regions of South America.

They had come to the foot of a gigantic mountain range, and with a rest of two days only commenced its ascent, or what really seemed but the hopeless attempt thereof, so stupendous and overwhelming did the vast mountains appear to these poor human pigmies at their feet.

Incessant and persistent labour carried them half-way up in the course of ten days, but the remaining portion—ah! there indeed—there was the pinch.

Any with fainter hearts than our friends would never have essayed even the attempt, but they did.

And they succeeded.

A glorious evening in these regions of perpetual summer!

A glorious sun shedding his dying radiance across the vast tableau of the forest and prairie, swamp, river, and arid plain, all spread out before our adventurers, who, standing in a group together, regard the glorious expanse.

Don Ramon, ever their guide and leading spirit, stretched forth his hand towards the far-away regions of the south.

‘Comrades,’ he said, ‘away across there, away beyond that dark grayish-blue line you see in the far horizon, there lies the glorious land for which we are bound—the land, the kingdom achieved by courage and perseverance. Ere two moons have passed yon thin circlet now visible in the sky, we shall be there, our object will have been achieved.’

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE WEALTHY FRIENDS.

THE upper ten of New York, the Empire City, the rich, the fashionable, and the great men in State affairs, were all in a whirl of excitement, curiosity, and wonder in the early spring of the year of grace 186—.

Who could those strangers be to whom money seemed as nothing?

It was known that a floating balance in their joint names was kept at the — Bank of never less than 13,000,000 dollars!

Upwards of two and a half millions sterling.

Evidently men of the world, accomplished, hospitable, and bent on enjoying themselves, the Four Friends were as popular as they were mysterious.

In addition to one of the most magnificent houses in Fifth Avenue and a villa on the Hudson, which rumour said had cost a mint of money and the grounds of which stretched for more than two miles along the river, two steam yachts always lay off in the Hudson, their steam always up, and another large and magnificent steamer of two thousand tons was also kept in readiness at New York for ocean sailing.

It may be readily imagined that such a display of wealth roused every 'sportsman' or gambler in New York, especially as not one of those four millionaires ever refused to play at any game of chance or skill, and in no case had they been pigeoned.

One reckless Mississippi scamp had made an

attempt to cheat one of them—a tall wiry man with an accent decidedly American, though whether assumed or not no one could tell, and opinions differed on the subject; but that individual coolly rose to his feet, grasped the unlucky gamester by his collar and his nether garments, and fairly flung him out of window, saying,

‘I guess, young man, you’re too clever to live, at least in the same room with me.’

The poor wretch by good fortune made his exit by a back window, and landed in the bed of a flower garden, sustaining no damage beyond the shock, and some cuts from the flower-pots and stones he fell on in his descent.

The lesson was perfectly successful—not a player offered with any of the strangers to repeat an attempt at cheating.

The punishment followed too closely on discovery, and that seemed unavoidable with such sharp-sighted opponents as the Four Friends.

Yet though so prompt to punish, the mysterious four were also ready to reward, and many a gift from an unknown donor found its way into deserving hands or assisted in increasing the funds of worthy institutions.

One lovely night, lovely with all the gorgeous tints that deck the foliage of American forests in the Indian summer, carelessly lounging round a table covered with such dessert as only America can supply, and only New York then, reclined the Four Friends.

The white canvas of the tent spread above them was open towards the Hudson, for it was at their country house by the banks of the river that we meet them, to admit the cool refreshing breeze from

its cool bosom, when the following conversation took place :

'I confess I am getting tired of this butterfly life,' began a dark and handsome man, who had lost the sight of one eye, reclining on a couch, between the puffs of a real havanna ; 'this sort of thing gets monotonous : can't we do something ?'

'Let us go back to New York, and go to sea for a bit. There's nothing like salt water for curing you of the blue devils caught ashore,' was the opinion of the same tall personage who had had the adventure with the sportsman.

'Or a run on the prairie after a buffalo would be better ; there's some excitement about that, and one gets tired of the same life day after day on board ship.'

The speaker was the stoutest and biggest, a heavier man altogether than the last, with a decided accent.

'I don't care which it is,' said the youngest of the party, whom no one could mistake for an Englishman, 'but I quite agree that this sort of life is one I should soon get tired of.'

After some further conversation, the suggestion of a voyage in their ocean steamer was adopted, and it was decided to make it the opportunity of showing their friends and acquaintances in New York how lavish, and yet well appointed, their hospitality could be.

'I should like to have a chance of having a brush with some of those plundering scoundrels down South, it would take some of the rust off us.'

'No, no,' said the first speaker, 'that is all over ; but our ocean fête must be such as never was seen or heard of before.'

And so it was decided that the Four Friends should carry out the plan of a great ocean party, and do so on a scale of magnificence startling even to citizens of the Empire City.

Invitations on a great scale were issued, and a fortnight after the conversation we have related the Inca steamed out past Sandyhook, with the *élite* of New York on board, the guests of the Four Friends.

What the expense of this trip must have been can only be conjectured; but after their return from a four days' cruise, all were unanimous in their praise of the princely magnificence of their hosts.

The ladies on board were all presented with valuable *souvenirs* of the trip, but in so well-judged a way were these presented, that for a wonder no jealousies or heart-burnings resulted from comparing the bijou remembrances of the trip on board the Inca.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LAST SCENE OF ALL.

IN the house of the Four Friends, in Fifth Avenue, there was one room into which no one entered except themselves, unless occasionally one of them should be accompanied by a confidential servant, and strange rumours were afloat as to the contents of this guarded chamber, for which each had a key.

Had any one entered this chamber nothing could have been seen in it in the way of furniture

—in fact, the room was empty; but on one side, built strongly into the wall, was the iron door of a gigantic safe.

To this each of the Friends had a key, and each visited it when he pleased.

Let us view the interior on such an occasion.

As soon as the first door was opened, another was revealed which required another key, and on throwing that open, four enormous compartments presented themselves.

The safe was in fact divided into three divisions from top to bottom, but the centre one was again divided at the middle into two.

In the upper of these bank-notes in rolls of various amounts, each marked with its value, lay piled to the very top. The right-hand compartment was filled with silver, as if only to save the trouble of changing; for the left was piled with gold in every possible form—ingots and coins, these last English or American.

So much any one could see before him when the safe was opened, and some of the confidential servants of the Four Friends had seen as much.

The lower middle compartment some of them had never seen, till one day, when the leader of the party, if he can be called so where all were equal, took his particular servant into the chamber of the safe, and then, for the first time to other eyes than those of the friends themselves, was the till of the safe, as it may be called, disclosed.

Filled almost to the brim—a mass of diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires—every precious stone one could think of met the eye of the wonder-stricken servant.

‘Here,’ said his master, ‘you served your time,

you told me, to a jeweller, and should be something of a judge. What do you think of those?’

And he placed in the hands of the jeweller-valet a magnificent brilliant and two emeralds.

‘If I get these mounted as I shall direct, I think the fair Miss Halcombe will say I have kept my promise that her tiara shall outshine all others at the President’s ball. Well, what are you looking at?’

‘At these jewels, sir; their value is immense.’

‘How much do you think, Smart?’

‘Over a hundred thousand dollars, sir, at least.’

‘And do you think,’ said his master, locking up the safe, ‘do you think that too much to pay to please a pretty woman? No, no, Smart. Call my carriage; I shall go to the jeweller’s.’

The President’s ball, to which allusion has just been made, was to be succeeded by the great ball of the season—that to be given by the Four Friends. A ball, indeed, it was not strictly, for it might rather be termed a feast.

Tables glittering with vessels of gold and silver, encrusted thickly with every precious stone, enticing even those most reluctant to eat—all to admire.

Servants, gorgeously attired, attended to the wants of the guests; nothing, in short, was wanting to the magnificent *tout ensemble*, and on every hand was heard nothing but eulogies of hosts capable of such profusion, tempered by such excellent taste. That feast was long remembered in the Empire City.

During the height of the festivity, the principal host displayed to his astonished guests such a sight as never before met their eyes.

Magnificent diamonds, at once remarkable for their enormous size and fine water; rubies as large as pigeons' eggs; emeralds which even exceeded those in size, and precious stones of all sorts—some set in pure gold of strange and antique style: armlets, bracelets, and anklets, and some unset altogether.

Our readers will have recognised in these four wealthy and mysterious strangers our four adventurers, who, some years ago, we last saw on the summit of a mountain range in Central South America. What they had attained in the way of wealth, in jewels, and in solid gold; how they attained this object, and what was the extent of their treasure, nobody knows.

On that subject they are all silent—morose.

The Copper Dutchman lights a cigarette, and calls for some of his favourite Shiedam.

Don Ramon smiles, quietly whiffs a long puff of smoke into his questioner's face, and replies,

'O, it is my genius—the good spirit of my family; it has been kind and watchful over me, and behold I am a rich man!'

Peter Carder would reply bluntly,

'Guess ye'd better mind your own business; I ain't a-going to write a book about it to please you. No, sirree!'

Andrew Battel alone seemed to offer any chance of pumping; but none would speak to him—and it could be obtained by no one, friend nor acquaintance, kith nor kin—of their adventures, and whether or not they really obtained possession of the jewelled crown and the Idol's Eye.

THE HIGHEST HONOUR, PARIS, 1878; THE CROSS OF THE LEGION OF HONOUR; THE GOLD MEDAL (L'ACADEMIE NATIONALE), AND ALSO THE SILVER MEDAL; THE GOLD MEDAL & DIPLOMA OF HONOUR, SOUTH AFRICA, 1877; THE MEDAL OF HONOUR AND DIPLOMA OF MERIT, PHILADELPHIA, 1876; THE GRAND DIPLOMA OF HONOUR, PARIS, 1874; THE GOLD MEDAL, PARIS, 1869; THE DIPLOMA OF EXTRAORDINARY MERIT, AMSTERDAM, 1869; MEDAL OF HONOUR, PARIS, 1867; PRIZE MEDAL, LONDON, 1862, &c., &c., HAVE BEEN AWARDED TO

JOHN BRINSMEAD & SONS' PIANOS,

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"Paris, November 4, 1878.

"CH. GOUNOD."

"We, the undersigned, certify that after having seen and most conscientiously examined the English Pianos at the Universal Exhibition of 1878, find that the palm belongs to the Grand pianos of the house of BRINSMEAD.

"NICOLAS RUBINSTEIN.

"D. MAGNUS.

"CHEVALIER ANTOINE DE KONTSKI

(Court Pianist to the Emperor of Germany)."

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